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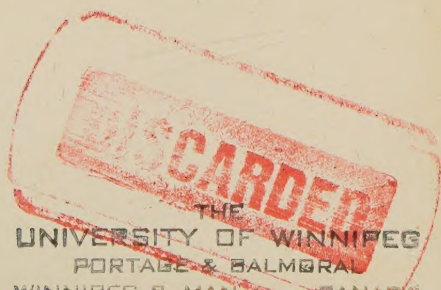
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ANGEL-FACE

BY

for
REGINALD N. HINCKS



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ANGEL-FACE

Being the farings and adventures of a Canadian woodsman in the English bush; and the strange effects of putting new Canadian wine into old English bottles.

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ANGEL-FACE

Angel-Face

CHAPTER I

CONCERNING SQUARE PEGS AND ROUND HOLES

“As the little beast himself would say: ‘We’re fairly up against it,’ ” said Bathurst to a solemn conclave of admiring friends assembled in the Third Study for the purpose of discussing the most serious problem that had ever been presented to them for solution.

This was nothing less than the Red Flag of Revolution itself, which, having reared its ugly head in their very midst, now threatened to smother within its gory folds every ancient and honorable rule and regulation that had hitherto governed that bureaucracy *in parvo* known to the world as Cranborough School.

“Quite so,” put in the Porpoise, as he rolled from one side to the other of the only easy chair the Study possessed, “and as the same author-

ity would so aptly remark: 'WHAT are we going to do about it?'

"Ignore the little worm," said Devereaux the lazy.

"Everlastingly lambast him," voted the more energetic Halley.

"And I vote we do nothing of the sort," said the quiet voice of Cavendish. "I suggest that we treat this novel and extremely unpleasant person as they do the girls in the tuck-shops."

"How's that?" chorussed the room.

"By filling 'em full of sweets till they get beastly ill, then they never want to sneak any on the quiet."

As this seemed such an entirely novel method of procedure, the room honored it with a moment's reflection; particularly as Cavendish *père* was known to be one of the greatest living Diplomats, and therefore the remarks of his son were occasionally treated with more or less respect. A thing not lightly won from that highly critical audience.

"Half a mo'," protested the Honorable Valentine Featherstonhaugh (better known to his companions as "Legs"). "Scheme seems quite neat in the abstract, but obscure as to the particulars. Elucidate, Dishwash, old

dear, throw in some details that our feeblcr intellects may grasp the magnitude of the idea."

"Gentlemen," said Cavendish, taking up a position such as he had seen his father assume when addressing his constituents, "is it your pleasure that I go into this matter further?"

"Oh, we're wasting time," said the practical Halley, "lambast the kid and be done with it."

Halley was a boy of singularly conservative ideas, in which a process known as "lambasting" held the predominant place.

"Shut up, Comet," said Bathurst. "Let's hear the oracle. As Legs so accurately puts it—Elucidate."

"The point to be considered," went on Cavendish, warming to his subject, "is whether the danger is a real one, or merely imaginary, and whether the hitherto undisputed authority of this Study is seriously threatened by the pestilent usurper."—Cavendish paused to take breath.

"Good egg that 'pestilent usurper,'" murmured Legs.

"You will all readily agree with me," continued the orator, "that from time immemorial the management of Cranborough School—I am speaking now not simply of such side

issues as 'curriculum' and the like—but the *real* management, such as what does and what does not constitute good and bad form—has invariably been dictated by the occupants for the time being of this Study."

"Hear—HEAR," was the unanimous reply.

"Now, there has come into our midst from out the Wild and Woolly West, one Julius P. Bowles, the product of an even wilder sire, to sow within our loyal ranks the deadly seed of discord. Am I right or am I wrong?" Here the speaker paused for effect.

"Well," said Bathurst, "you take the very dickens of a time to say it, but you're dead right all the same."

"So far, so good," resumed Dishwash. "Now, it seems to me that there are only two courses of action open to us, namely—Fight or Compromise."

"Oh . . . Fight." This from the hot-heads.

"Certainly . . . lambast," from the conservative member.

"One moment," said Bathurst, "just what do you mean by 'compromise'?"

"Send a delegate to the enemy," said Caven-dish, "suggesting a parley—an armistice to be observed while negotiations are being conducted. Combine the wisdom of the serpent

with the gentleness of the dove . . . and . . . and . . . find out what the little rotter wants." Cavendish was finding it a little hard to keep on the higher oratorical levels, and so abruptly concluded: "And jolly well see that he doesn't get it."

"Well, what's the first move?" asked the Chairman.

"Appoint a Committee to meet the chap," replied Dishwash. Then, remembering a phrase in one of his father's speeches, he added: "With power to act."

"Put me on that committee," said the muscular Halley, "I'll do the 'acting' part."

Finally it was decided that Messrs. Bathurst, Featherstonhaugh, Devereaux and Cavendish be and they are hereby appointed to meet the said Julius P. Bowles after evening prep. and legally—or otherwise—to utterly confound him. Halley was not included, as likely to complicate the issue.

After evening prep. was over, and the tired Housemaster was settling down for a quiet glance at the world's news,—to forget, if possible, that the cosmos held so baffling a study as the genus—boy—there came a rap at his library door, and in answer to his invitation

to enter, there appeared before him quite the most exasperating specimen of the aforesaid genus that he had ever known in twenty odd years of experience.

At the first glance it seemed as if it couldn't be a boy at all that stood so quietly in the doorway, but rather some slim and perfectly formed girl in boy's clothes—without any of the girl's natural aptitude for wearing those clothes neatly.

The face was one that many a great artist might—and in after years did—rave about; so much so that it had earned for its unfortunate possessor the nickname of "Angel-Face," thereby adding much misery to an otherwise none too happy life.

Julius P. Bowles was surely one of the strangest beings that ever gained admittance to an English Public School. Bred and born in the great Western States of Canada, he had from his very infancy wandered throughout that vast territory, together with a father bewitched by the lure of the creek and the bench. Lumber camps, mining camps, construction camps, fish camps—hills, plains, rivers and the sea—he knew and loved them all; but never had he stayed long enough in any one of them to even guess the meaning of the word "home".

Then came the tragic crisis that altered all his life—the long hike into an unexplored country; the finding of the tremendously rich diggings that made his father one of the richest men in the West—followed almost immediately by that father's sudden and fatal illness.

During the last three days of lingering, the elder man laid his commands upon his son—commands which the boy never dreamt of disobeying.

Until the shock of approaching death was upon him, Jack Bowles never thoroughly realized how criminally he had neglected the boy's education. If ever the thought occurred to him, he put it off until such time as the elusive rocks should have yielded up the necessary treasure to enable him to do the thing properly and send the lad to some English Public School.

Now that it was too late to accomplish this himself, he impressed upon Julius the necessity of returning to the land of his ancestors, and of gaining admittance to Cranborough School, there to make what friends he could, and so build up for himself a social circle that would be useful to him in after life.

Having given the boy the name of the old family solicitor, he further urged upon him to keep the fact of his enormous wealth from as

many people as possible, "For," said he, "a rich man has the world for his acquaintance, but may never find a friend."

And when the little lad—so woe-begone to look at, yet so worldly-wise in fact—packed up his few belongings to carry out his father's wishes, the name of a thoroughly trustworthy, but quite unknown legal man was all that stood between the wanderer and the world.

After an infinity of trouble, the lawyer at last succeeded in getting the boy admitted to Cranborough by placing the whole facts before the authorities and binding them to secrecy.

"Come in, lad, come in—and shut the door behind you," said Mr. Grant, none too pleased at having his evening interrupted. "What do you want to see me for?"

"I'm right sorry to worry you, sir," came the clear young Western voice, "but could you oblige me with tonight's news-sheet? I'm fairly fed-up with school junk for to-day."

"Well, my boy, it isn't usual to supply the Lower School with the evening papers," said the Housemaster, "and I'm sure you will pardon my pointing out that 'fed-up' is not a colloquialism that we encourage on this side of the Atlantic. However," he added hastily,

as he saw the look of intense disappointment on the boy's face, "you can have one of my own papers if you like, provided you return it before you go to bed. Which will you have—*The Globe* or *The Pall Mall Gazette*?"

"Gee, but that's bully good of you, sir," said the boy eagerly, "just anything that's got printer's ink on it and is up-to-date will fill every item on the bill."

"Very well, there's *The Globe*. Shut the door after you. Oh, and Bowles," he called.

"Yes, sir."

"DO try, there's a good lad, to suppress some of your more fascinating expressions. You may not know it, but you're making my life this term a veritable weariness of the flesh. The whole of the Lower School (and I am told the disease is spreading rapidly) is catching these apt and often forcible phrases of yours, and I tell you quite candidly, I haven't an idea how to counteract it."

"Well, I sure am peeved, Mr. Grant," came the contrite reply, "yes, sir, I sure am—" Then he burst out with: "What do these guys want with talking like me, sir? I don't hanker after talking like them."

"Unfortunately not," returned the Master. "Well, think it over and see what you can do to help me."

"You bet cher life I will, sir—and I want to tell you right now, Mr. Grant, you've treated me like a white man ever since I landed on this beach, and if there's anything I can do to ease things up any—why hand it out, sir, and I'll be right there with the goods."

"Yes, yes, I've no doubt you will," hastily interposed the harassed tutor. "We'll see what we can do, won't we?"

"We sure will, sir—AND thank you."

And Angel-Face went off to the Common Room to devour his treasure.

It was there that the luckless Tommy Adams found him—having been commanded by the Czars of the Third Study to bid Master Bowles attend the Conference.

"Oh, there you are, Bowles," said the fag. "I've been looking for you all over the shop.—You're wanted in the Third."

As the recipient of this important news didn't even seem to hear it, Tommy repeated:

"I say—you're wanted in the Third. You'd jolly well better hurry up, or there'll be ructions."

Angel-Face flashed an irritated glance over the top of his paper and snapped out:

"Beat it!"

"Oh, but I say—" began the other.

A look of suppressed fury passed over the fair young face, turning it for the moment into that of a positive fiend, while he hissed:

“Beat it—will yer.”

At this the kid began to blub.

“It’s—it’s—all very well for you—but it’s ME they’ll beat, if I go back without you.”

“Why—Why—What the Sam Hill should they want to beat YOU for?” said Angel-Face.

“Be—be—cause they want y—you, and they’ll think I’m to blame,” blubbered the child.

A queer little smile passed over the other’s face.

“Won’t be happy till they get me, eh?—Well, well, we’ll soon fix all that.—Get a move on.”

And seizing his cap, he rushed out of the Common Room, still grasping his precious paper, followed by the now thoroughly nervous Tommy Adams.

To the latter’s horror, his leader burst into the sacred precincts without so much as knocking at the door, and long before the astonished occupants could utter a single word of protest, they were assailed by a perfect torrent of words.

"Now why the Heavenly Happy Valley can't you guys act like ordinary humans? This kid says you're going to beat him all up if I don't come to this joint of yours.—Well, here I am, so that let's HIM out.—And now I've been here, I'm just hiking it right back again, pronto . . . Savvy? . . . I'm busy till bed-time. . . . Get that? . . . Busy . . . till . . . bed-time. After that, you can pow-wow all you want." And with that he was gone as suddenly as he had come.

Sheer, unadulterated astonishment fairly hypnotized the Committee, until at last Legs broke the silence with:

"As the pestilence itself would remark, 'WHAT do you know about that?'"

"Well . . . of . . . all . . . the . . . darned . . . cheek," muttered Bathurst.

"Brothers," said Dishwash, "THAT is the limit—oh, hang it all," he continued, "we can't keep from using the little beast's expressions, even when we don't want to."

Devereaux the Lazy had not yet commented on the situation. Now he added his quota.

"There's something radically wrong here," he said slowly, "something I can't get the hang of, but if you fellows like, I'll have a try too.

If I fail, then you can have a go at it in your own way."

"Why, what on earth's in the wind, Devils?" said Bathurst, "whoever heard of YOU, of all people, offering—positively *offering* to get up and DO something."

"Well, I've got a theory and I'd like to test it," replied the other. "Of course, I may be altogether off the track," he hastened to add, "in which case, as I'm acting entirely on my own, nobody's hurt; on the other hand, I MAY do some good. Any objection, anybody?"

"None from me," said Legs.

"Or me," added Dishwash.

"Same here," agreed Bathurst. "In what seems to be the current language of the day: Go to it, my son, Go to it."

"Thanks—I will."

And the lazy son of the Marquis of Devereaux slowly uncoiled himself and strolled over to the Common Room.

He was thinking very much harder than was his usual wont as he strolled across the Quad. He didn't overlook the fact that he was deliberately laying himself open to a most unpleasant snubbing, a form of entertainment he particularly disliked. But something in

the beautiful excited face trying to put things right for the trembling Tommy Adams made this usually indifferent young man think the risk well worth the running.

With the exception of Bowles curled up over his precious paper, he found the Common Room empty; some other attraction having claimed the attention of its usually noisy throng of inhabitants. He seated himself on a desk not far from the reader and opened the attack.

"Any objection to five minutes jaw?" he asked politely.

"Judas Priest!" exclaimed Angel-Face, dropping *The Globe* on his knees. "Not again, surely not again! See here," he went on furiously, "I put it up to you quite plainly. Here have I been all the blessed day long falling for this hoary dope they pour into you, yes, sir, falling for it, and never batting so much as an eye-lid. Now I've struck a regular Bonanza of real, good, life-size news that a man can read without feeling ashamed of himself; and I only have till bed-time to get down to hard-pan. Then, first of all, you yank me out of here by threatening to beat up a kid, and now you come along to waste precious time palavering. Next thing you know,"

he finished fretfully, "that all-fired bell will call off my lien on this god-sent bit of rag."

"I see your point," slowly drawled the other, "but nevertheless I still persist in thinking that you'll get more benefit by listening to me than you will by reading *The Globe* newspaper. Unless, of course," he added, as a sort of afterthought, "you'd really **RATHER** be downright rude."

"How's that?" came the question like forked lightning, "what's that about being rude?"

"Merely that," rejoined his companion, "when a fellow puts himself to considerable inconvenience to do another fellow what he believes to be a good turn, it is simple rudeness not to hear what the first fellow has to say."

"Meaning me?"

"Meaning you."

"Well, I guess you win. I'll try and sit quiet till you get through."

"I must be thankful for even that small mercy, and be as brief as I can," said Devereaux. "Now, as I understand it, you're not particularly happy here—or am I wrong?"

"Not so as you could notice it," said Angel-Face.

"In addition to that," continued the other,

"you have doubtless observed that you have managed very ably to thoroughly upset the whole School."

"So Mr. Grant figures it out. It beats me."

"Well, has it ever struck you that it would make things much jollier all round if you turned to and just altered all that?"

Angel-Face jumped out of his seat and started pacing up and down.

"Now, by the late Lord Harry, if you're not off down the same old trail. Look here, Devereaux," and the small face looked up eagerly, "honest ter goodness, I've no more idea of upsetting this kid's tea-party than I have of jumping claims in the moon. I guess my life's been some different from the rest of you, and while you can't be expected to see things the way I do, surely the same thing applies to me. I only ask one thing," he concluded, more pathetically than he knew, "and that is to be let alone. Surely that ain't much to ask?"

"That is precisely one of the things I expected you to say," replied Devereaux, "and that is exactly what can never happen at a Public School like Cranborough. You CAN'T be let alone, it isn't possible."

"Gee! That's a pretty poor lookout for me then."

By this time *The Globe* newspaper was completely forgotten and lay neglected on the floor. Suddenly the suspicion, born of many a fight and practical joke, broke out afresh and led to the sharp query:

"Say, what's the game? What are you REALLY here for anyway?"

"If you particularly want to know," replied the other, "I came on the impulse of the moment, prompted by the fact that you came to the Third just now simply to save a fag a possible licking, and incidentally laying up for yourself all kinds of trouble. I also came because I had a theory and wanted to test it. It struck me that it was just possible that this very unpleasant term has been largely caused by your colossal ignorance of School, and what School life demands from all of us. And further, that if such proved to be the case, it seemed a thousand pities not to try to remedy it.—Sure I don't bore you?"

"No, SIR," said Bowles quickly. "Go right ahead."

"And then it occurred to me that I never remembered seeing you around with anyone in particular—didn't seem to have any special pal as most of us have. And that rather strengthened my theory that you had never

had anyone to put you on the right track, or to switch you back on to it when once you ran off. Am I right?"

"You certainly are," said Angel-Face wearily.

"Is one permitted to ask why?" continued his questioner.

"Because there isn't a kid on the whole darned lot that's interested in the things that interest me, that's why," was the response.

"Sure you've tried everybody?"

"Tried?" burst out the lad. "Tried? I've tried till I'm sick of trying. You can't understand—none of you can understand," went on the excited little voice. "When you've lived all your life free and out in the open like I have, to suddenly find yourself roped, thrown and branded—penned up in a corral and never let out on the range. . . . When there AIN'T no range to be let out on. . . . Tried? One day I was speaking of going after bear, and the kid's eyes nearly popped out of his head at the mention of it. Tried? Time and again I've slipped off by myself and durned nearly blubbed like a kid for want of somebody to talk REAL talk to."

Devereaux smiled to himself to watch the eager little face scorning the attributes of its kind.—Then he said:

"Now, supposing I found you someone who will not only listen to your yarns, but maybe cap them with some you've never heard, would you promise not to bite his head off before you've given him a fair trial?"

"Do you mean to tell me," said Angel-Face slowly, "that there's anybody in this burg that I've overlooked who can talk about God's Country from first hand; IS there?" The big brown eyes were suspiciously bright as he added: "If there is, lead me to him."

"Just one moment," said Devereaux, "supposing I can, in your own language, 'produce the goods,' will you give me your word of honor to do as he suggests with regard to School matters?"

"Say, Devereaux, I'll tell you what I'll do. If you can find any chap who will talk 'out West' to me, and let me yarn back at him all I want, then he can fill in the amount and I'll sign the cheque."

"I call that, Angel-Face—What d'yer got?"

Devereaux swung off the desk and faced the dumbfounded lad.

"YOU?" whispered the latter.

"Sure Mike! I've got an uncle in British Columbia; bet yer I've shot a larger bear than you have. Ever been to Kadiak after the big fellers? Some sport that, believe me!"

Angel-Face let his hand be gripped by his new-found friend, and it was only the clanging of the "all-fired" bell that saved him from an exhibition not usually indulged in by most big game hunters.

CHAPTER II

A TEST OF FRIENDSHIP

It was not very long before Angel-Face began to feel the practical effects of Devereaux's friendship. A hundred and one little tips that the Canadian lad had never thought of made his School life a much happier experience than it had been heretofore.

Almost at the outset of the partnership they had a great piece of luck. Devereaux had insisted that a working knowledge of cricket was absolutely essential to his friend's bid for popularity; without that, he said, they were going to have an awful hard row to hoe. So, much against his will, Angel-Face would slip down to the nets on the quiet to be initiated into the mysteries of that ancient and honorable game.

But although his fielding had been just about as good as possible right from the start, he all but gave the whole thing up in despair whenever he took a bat in his hand; so much so that one evening, after being knocked about all over his body—to the huge amusement of

the few onlookers—he limped back to the pavilion thoroughly determined to give the game up, and drop everything but a theoretical interest in it.

“It’s quite hopeless, Devils,” he growled. “The blamed thing’s got my goat and that’s all there is to it.”

“It does seem hard luck,” said Devereaux, “and you’re such a good fielder too. Well, it can’t be helped, you’ve done your best and no one can say you haven’t tried hard enough. Hello,” he added, looking out of the window, “there’s Jackson going in to his supper. Bother! I must have a knock of some sort before tomorrow’s match. Just come back and pitch me up one or two, there’s a good chap.”

And therein came the luck, for if the pro. had been still on the ground and not gone to his supper much earlier than he ought to have done, Angel-Face would probably never have known he could handle a ball at all, and Cranborough School would certainly have lost one of the finest schoolboy bowlers of his day.

“Don’t try to bowl too fast,” called out Devereaux, “just toss ’em up on the wicket while I let out at a few.”

Angel-Face, only too anxious to help the friend who had done so much for him, took

special pains to follow out his instructions. Whenever on previous occasions he had tried to bowl, he had always slung them down as hard as ever he could, with the result that his own feet, or the batsman's head, were most likely to suffer. Now, however, he just stepped to the crease and delivered the ball with a strange and utterly unconscious flick of the wrist, that had the most surprising results for everybody.

Receiving, as he thought, a nice easy half-volley just off the wicket, Devils stepped out and let fly, only to find that his bat and the ball failed to connect and that he had been clean bowled round his legs.

"By Jove, Angel," he cried. "If you could only do that when you wanted to, what a trundler you'd be!"

"Some fluke all right," replied Bowles. "Hand us the sphere and I'll try and toss up some to hit."

To the utter astonishment of both of them, the same thing happened again. Devereaux forgot all about his knock and kept Angel-Face tossing up "slows" until they both had to make a bolt for prep., by which time they had discovered that as long as Angel didn't try to bowl too fast, he could break the ball

either way in a most unprecedented manner. As Devils remarked: "He could make a walking delegate of the best bat in the School."

Now, Cranborough, like many another English Public School of the period, was prouder by far of its athletic, rather than of its scholastic reputation, and nothing was too good for any boy who could help to uphold that reputation and place it on an even higher plane. Not that the School did not provide a most excellent education—quite the contrary—but, on the other hand, there was no overlooking the fact that much was forgiven the boy who could "make a century," get lots of "tries," or do the "hundred" in or around eleven seconds.

So that when Angel-Face found himself graduated into this very desirable class, his troubles were largely at an end.

It was just after the great match with Hadleigh, in which Angel-Face had covered himself with glory by taking all ten wickets for 35 runs, that the terrible scandal occurred which nearly wrecked not only his School life, but all of his subsequent career.

Now, it had always been the custom of the School that the Athletic Fund (at this time

amounting to some hundred and fifty pounds) should be administered by one master (in this case Mr. Grant) and one boy (represented by Devereaux). It was the very foolish rule that instead of banking the money as it came in from time to time, it was kept locked up in a cash-box reposing in the master's desk until each half-yearly audit, when it was transferred to the Bank, where it should have gone in the first place. To this cash-box there were but two keys, one of which was held by each custodian.

The night before the Catastrophe happened, Devils and Angel-Face sat talking in the former's study, when the subject turned upon money. Now, although Bowles had told his friend far more of his life than anyone else knew about, he had not told him (mindful of his father's last warning) anything of the enormous fortune that was his. On the contrary, he had allowed Devils to believe (together with the rest of the School) that pocket or any other kind of money was conspicuous by its absence.

"I tell you what it is, Angel," said Devereaux, "I'm going to be most awfully short this term—don't know how the dickens I'm going to pull through. When I've paid

my subs., and what I owe Jackson, it looks as if I'm going to be all in, and the poor old Governor is so absolutely strapped that there is no help to be looked for in that quarter."

"Maybe I could scrape up a few dollars," said Angel-Face cautiously.

"Maybe you could, and maybe you would," was the reply, "but it's more than maybe I wouldn't take it from a chap who can hardly scrape along as it is."

Julius had never seen his friend in this mood before, but he **HAD** seen money-worry lots of times, and knew the marks it left on a man. Now he felt convinced that there was something else behind it all, about which he knew nothing, and that did not suit him a bit; so he sent out a feeler.

"Up against anything in particular?" he said casually, "or just grouching on general principles?"

Devils gazed moodily at his immaculate boots for some minutes (Devils always looked just as if he'd come out of a bandbox and Julius never ceased to wonder how it was done), then he seemed to make up his mind to some drastic line of action, for he got up and started pacing up and down the Study floor.

"I'm going to talk, Angel-Face," he said.

"Not that you can do any good, but simply to relieve my own mind. I've just GOT to unload on to somebody and you're the victim."

"Shoot away," replied Julius.

"You know Billings in the High?" and receiving a nod of assent, Devils proceeded: "Well, you know he keeps a regular first-class tuck-shop, but you probably don't know that he also runs a very second-class money-lending business on the side."

A prolonged whistle from Angel-Face.

"When first I came here," Devereaux went on, "I was fool enough to exceed my allowance before term was more than half over; consequently, I ran up quite a lot of tick with Billings. I was an even greater fool to listen to his suggestion and borrowed money from him at an exorbitant rate of interest, with the result that the beastly thing has been accumulating like a gigantic snow-ball ever since. Do what I will, I simply cannot wipe it out, and if he puts on the screw, as he half hinted at to-day, I'm done for for good and all."

"Why not threaten to show the grafter up?" said the practical Angel. "He'd run the risk of losing all the School trade and that would hit him just where he lives."

"I thought of that," returned the other,

"but it can't be done. No, the cute old beast knows his business all right. He knows well enough that no boy wants to be expelled—as he certainly would be. And he knows that the School Authorities would hate to let it become known that this thing had been going on under their very noses and without their knowledge. It would do the School no end of harm."

"Got any particular line of action mapped out?"

"Not a thing. I've looked at it every single way I can, but there isn't a glimmer of daylight as far as I can see."

"Any objection to my doing some figuring on my own account?"

"Not the least bit in the world. Go ahead and figure all you want, but for Heaven's sake," he added anxiously, "don't give the show away to anybody."

"You trust your Uncle," said Angel-Face. "How much do you owe?"

"Something over a hundred pounds," was the weary reply.

And the very next day it happened.

Nobody seemed to know any details of any sort, but there wasn't a boy in the School that

didn't know something was radically wrong, and fearfully looked forward to a thunderstorm of the very worst variety breaking over their devoted heads.

There was hardly a lad at Cranborough during the next few hours that did not very thoroughly overhaul his past mis-doings in fear and trembling lest he should discover the missing key to the situation. But it wasn't until supper time that the mystery was solved.

Just before second grace, the Old Man himself came and stood at the head of the High Table.

Now, as the Headmaster of Cranborough only attended a meal in Hall about twice a term, everybody felt that the Climax had arrived. They were further confirmed in this view when Mr. Grant called out firmly: "You will all retain your seats."

Henry Chancellor Begbie, "Craven," "Ireland" and Goodness and himself alone knew what other "Scholar," was a truly awe-inspiring figure. The mere delivery of the simple message "you're wanted by the Old Man" was guaranteed to take the sap out of any boy's knees, no matter how innocent his previous conduct had been. There was indeed another side to this rough exterior, but that was known

to very few, and was certainly conspicuous by its absence on this occasion.

With his right hand pulling at the shoulder of his gown, and his left gripping the back of a chair, he stood facing the assembled School like some avenging Jove. Instead, however, of the ringing, almost raucous voice to which they were accustomed, he started in a key so low that those at the back of the Hall had to strain their ears to hear him.

“In addressing you tonight, I am about to do a thing which I never even considered to be within the bounds of possibility. For some thirty odd years now it has been my privilege, and my pleasure, to guide the destinies of Cranborough, and it was my hope, until to-day, that I should leave her on a higher level than I found her. With the army of boys who have occupied the places that you do now, I have had to cross many a rough piece of country, and bridge many a dangerous swamp; but never,” here his voice fell almost to a whisper, “never the swamp of **DISGRACE.**” He paused a moment, and then went on with biting sarcasm, “**THAT** unenviable distinction has been left for **YOU.** For I now have the misfortune to inform you that for the first time in the history of the School, you have

amongst your honorable company a **THIEF**."

A rustle of consternation went through everybody.

"It seems," continued the quiet voice, "that the One hundred and fifty pounds comprising the Athletic Fund was not safe in your hands. Had I been asked, I should have had not the slightest hesitation in saying that this—or any other sum of money—was perfectly secure if kept upon the School mantelpiece. I was wrong. The cash-box in Mr. Grant's desk has been opened—opened, **NOT** forced—and the money abstracted therefrom."

An audible murmur ran through the assembly.

"There are two courses open to me, namely: (1) To put the matter in the hands of the police, and (2) To lay traps myself with a view to catching the thief. I propose to do neither, at present."

The speaker then raised his voice to its usual strident pitch, which was all the more startling by a comparison with his previous tone.

"This is my word to you. While nothing can remove the stain that has marked every one of us, the best thing that could happen now would be that the guilty boy himself should come to me and make what restitution

he is able, and at the same time give me the opportunity of helping him to start afresh. If that is impossible, then the next best thing is that you yourselves should clear up this unclean thing that has happened among you. I therefore give you one full week, and if by that time neither of the two things which I have suggested shall have happened, then I, myself, shall act."

Whereupon the Old Man turned upon his heels and left them all dumbfounded.

How Angel-Face got himself from the Hall to the gallery of the second fives court, he never did remember, but as that was the quietest place in the whole School, and he wanted badly to think, think, think, he must have gone there direct. A horrible jingle kept running in his head: "Only two keys—only two keys—only two keys." Every time he tried to marshal all the facts as he knew them, it kept interrupting him with its incessant: "Only two keys—only two keys."

He well remembered a saying of his father: "You can't rely on ANY man until he has been through the Hell-fire of temptation." Had Devils been playing with that fire and got burnt in the process? That was the question. No. No! he wouldn't even consider it. And

yet, the demon in his head kept humming: "Only two keys."

Then he suddenly realized that at this very moment poor old Devils was probably wrestling with this same problem.

"Jumping Jehoshaphat!" muttered Angel-Face. "Here am I, his best pal, leaving him alone at a time like this; maybe he'll think I suspect him." And he scrambled down the stairs again and ran like blazes for the Study.

There he found a Devereaux that he had never seen before, and scarcely recognized. Worry and anxiety seemed to have completely changed the boy's whole being. Before, one of the frankest and most outspoken of persons, he had now a secretive, almost furtive, look, and his speech was bitter as gall.

"Well?" was the biting greeting. "Made up your mind whether I'm a fit person to associate with, or have you joined the noble army of Sherlock Holmes, so thoughtfully suggested by the Old Man?"

"Now see here," pleaded Angel-Face. "What's the sense of cutting up rough with me? Nobody dreams that YOU took the confounded money. It's plumb ridiculous."

"IS it?" was the sneering reply. "I presume you don't suggest that Mr. Grant took it?"

"Of course not."

"Ergo, as there are only two keys to the cash-box, and as the lock wasn't forced, AND as I wanted money just about as badly as anyone could . . ."

"They don't know that," quickly interposed Angel-Face.

"No, but YOU do," snapped Devereaux. "And so, you see," he continued, "it's a little difficult to make up your mind, isn't it, that I'm not the thief?"

"Devils, you want a rest . . . that's what's the matter with you. . . . You're all upset and don't know what you're saying," said Julius.

"You have said it, my sometime friend," was the bitter response. "I DO want a rest; goodness knows my own company is gruesome enough, but it is infinitely preferable to any other just now."

"Well," said Angel-Face resignedly. "I can't very well stay in your own study if you don't want me, but remember," he said from the doorway, "I'm always just outside if I'm needed."

If he could only have looked back through the oak panels, he would have seen Devils bury his head in his arms, utterly worn out, murmuring brokenly: "Et tu, Brute."

From the moment he left the study, Angel-Face never ceased to try and worry a way out of the difficulty, but so far with little result. It needed but two more days before the termination of the fateful week, and no fresh evidence had come to light. Nevertheless, a firm conviction seemed to have been established that Devereaux was the culprit. Nobody knew just how this came about, but there it was, aided by rumors (authorship unknown) that Devils was head over ears in debt.

That night, Angel-Face made up his mind that he wouldn't go to sleep until he had found **SOME** plan of action, no matter how hopeless, to lift this nightmare from his friend.

Suddenly, he sat straight up in bed, gripping the blanket in front of him.

"Gee!" he muttered. "It could be done, yes, by the Great Horn Spoon, it **COULD** be done . . . but how? If there's a misfire anywhere, I may wound the wrong buck. But it's an idea anyway. I'll work it out tomorrow."

But he didn't. He worked it all out that night, and when tomorrow came, his plans were all cut and dried and waiting for action.

That afternoon was a half-holiday and it found Master Bowles seated in the very par-

ticular private parlor of one Billings, a confectioner in High Street.

It would have been perfectly obvious to an impartial observer that, young as was Mr. Billings' visitor, he yet had that gentleman nearly scared out of his seven senses. He stammered and he stuttered, and he blustered and he bluffed—all to absolutely no purpose, and so, he lamely concluded:

"Well, if I 'as ter do wot yer wants me ter do, wot is it wot I've got ter do?"

"Easy as rolling off a log," said Angel-Face cheerfully. "First of all, I give you a cheque for what Mr. Devereaux owes you and for which I take your receipt dated six months ago. D'you get me?"

"Yes, yes, what else?" said the now thoroughly nervous baker.

"Then you go straight to Mr. Grant. Put him wise to the fact that Mr. Devereaux **DID** owe you money (it's bound to come out anyway) but that he paid you in full over six months ago. Don't forget that: six . . . months . . . ago. Next, you tell him you're not happy in your mind (that's no lie, is it?) because of my having come to you about a week back and leaving with you the sum of one hundred and fifty pounds to be drawn on

as I want it. Then you ask him if he thinks it all right for you to hold this money, as you don't want to hunt trouble. You DON'T, do you?"

"No, no, certainly not," said the perspiring Mr. Billings.

"After which," continued his persecutor, "you come straight back here, pronto."

"What's that?" asked Billings, mystified.

"Pronto . . . Jackass . . . Tout de suite . . . On the jump . . . Pretty darned quick . . . Savvy?"

"Oh, yes, I understand you now. I'll go," said Billings. "And if I do all this for you, you promise to keep yer mouth shut about me, don't yer?"

"Surest thing you know," said Angel-Face gaily; "you can bank on that, Billings, old buck. I don't know what they'll do to you over there at the School, but this I DO know, that it won't be a thing to what I'LL do, once I get busy."

"All right, all right," cried the victim. "I said I'd go, and I will."

"Then GIT," said Angel-Face.

And Mr. Billings *got*.

Returning at the end of an hour or so, evidently much relieved in his mind, the confec-

tioner found his youthful tormentor quietly consuming quantities of raspberry tarts.

"Well, how goes it?" was the pastry-laden enquiry.

"My word, but you'll cop it when you gets back," said Mr. Billings with much relish. "Oh, you **WILL** cop it fair."

"So I confidently anticipated," was the calm reply, "let's hear what happened?"

"Mr. Grant 'e's in a fair how d'you do, 'e is," commenced the baker. "Fust 'e seemed pleased as Punch, then, when I told them lies about you, 'e seemed mad as blazes . . . dinged if I can make 'ed nor tail of it."

"Fortunately you don't have to, Billings," chirped Angel-Face. "That's my funeral. So long! I quite enjoyed the tarts. And mind you," he added, "if you so much as breathe a word to a living soul of this, I'll bust you higher than a kite."

And Angel-Face, like the brave little soul that he was, went out to face the music.

The first tuning-up of the orchestra, as it were, reached him directly he turned into the Quad, a small boy informing him that there was "a whale of a shindy up at Grant's." So, on the principle that "a foe well met is a battle half won," he proceeded to the scene of the disturbance.

On investigation, this turned out to be little more than excited enquiries for himself, and the information that Mr. Grant wanted him at once, if not sooner.

"Somebody said you wanted me, sir," said Angel-Face, as he walked into the Study.

John Grant did not reply for a minute, but fixed his eyes on the lad's face, as though he would read his very soul.

"Haven't you got anything to tell me?" he said at last.

"Not that I know of, sir," replied Julius.

"Let me help your memory. Billings . . . has . . . been . . . here."

If Mr. Grant had expected any signs of guilt, he was doomed to disappointment.

"Really, sir," was all the answer he got.

"Come, Bowles," said Mr. Grant sternly, "this won't do at all—I thought at least that when you knew that Billings had told me where the stolen money went and how it came into his hands, you would at least see the futility of any further concealment."

"And DID Billings tell you where the stolen money went to, sir?" was the innocent query. "I didn't know that Billings knew anything about it."

"Neither does he," said Mr. Grant sharply,

"but the fact that on the very day that I missed the hundred and fifty pounds you placed that identical sum in his hands for safe keeping, seems to be a moderately clear indication."

The fact that there was not even a start of surprise from the boy was proof positive to the Master that he was guilty. And that is precisely what that same boy had hoped for. He wasn't going to confess to a theft that he had never committed, but he was quite prepared—nay, anxious—that the School Authorities should form that opinion for themselves.

"Of course, sir," he said, "if you've already made up your mind that I've taken the money, it's no use my saying anything."

"I'm bitterly disappointed in you, Bowles," said his master. "I would readily have staked my life on your honesty—and LOST it," he added, sadly.

This was rather more than Angel-Face had bargained for; but all he said was: "I'm sorry, sir."

"I sincerely hope you are," replied Mr. Grant, "but, unhappily, I doubt it. You will go to your study at once and not leave the corridor without permission."

"Very well, sir," said Angel-Face meekly. And although when he got outside, he had

a horrible feeling of having been beaten with a big stick, still he finally came to the conclusion that he had come out of the ordeal much better than he might have.

On getting to the study, he found another one awaiting him. Devils was pacing up and down the floor, and one glance at his excited face clearly showed that he had heard the news. Before he could say anything, however, Angel-Face started the conversation by saying: "Looks as if it was my turn to say, 'to what am I indebted for the honor of this visit?' "

"Now, Angel," burst out his friend, "don't YOU go making a fool of yourself; just because I was silly ass enough to do so, is no reason why you should."

"Ass? how?" asked the other.

"Why, man alive!" cried the excited Devils, "I didn't take that confounded money and YOU know it. It is equally certain that YOU didn't take it and I know it."

"DO you?" asked Angel.

"Of course I do," said his friend. "It's ridiculous."

"Why?"

The calm question seemed rather to stagger Devils for the moment, but he went headlong on.

"Why . . . why . . . why? Because it IS plain madness on the face of it."

"Again: WHY?"

"Oh, Shucks!" said the other impatiently. "Don't ask idiotic questions."

"Then what are you here for?" the even voice went on.

"To clear up this nightmare that Mr. Grant has got in his head."

"How do you propose to do it?"

"By getting you to deny that you know the first thing about the beastly money and then making everyone else believe it."

"O-ho!" drawled Angel-Face, "then you want my DENIAL, do you?"

"Of course I do. How can I pass it on if you don't give it to me?"

"Then you won't get it," snapped the other.

The boy didn't in the very least realize it, but the terrific mental strain of the last few days was beginning to tell on him and he was rapidly losing the cool nerve upon which he had relied.

"Now, don't be a silly juggins," said Devereaux, by now the calmer of the two. "Don't start flying off the handle like that. Just look what an infernal mess I made of our friendship through this very same thing."

Inside Angel's head seven hundred and seventy-seven thousand demons were playing a game of hockey with sledge hammers, so all he said was:

"Oh! Go to the Devil!"

"No," returned the other. "You can't rile me, because I won't BE riled. As you seem to have lost your head, it's up to me to think for both."

"So I've lost my head, have I?" thundered the boy. "Well, I tell you right now that—that—"

But what it was he was about to tell, nobody ever knew, because just at that point the largest demon of them all got a beautiful opening and shot a goal, which promptly snapped something important in Angel's head and he took no further interest in the proceedings.

"Yes," said the Doctor later, when talking the case over with the Old Man. "Just as pretty a case of brain fever—WITH complications—as ever I want to see. We shall be mighty lucky if we pull him through," he added gravely.

CHAPTER III

“THEN HO FOR THE MERRY GREEN WOODS,”
SAY I

Thanks to a constitution mothered by the great Canadian forests, the brain fever, after doing its worst, left in a huff and took all its ill consequences with it. This, however, did not happen until term was well over, and the invalid and his nurses were the only occupants of the School.

During the days of his convalescence, Angel-Face had got to know, and love, a truly remarkable person. Hitherto this rough being of awe-inspiring exterior had answered in the boy's mind to the nick-name of “Old Man,” and had embodied within itself all the pains and penalties (together with the necessary executive authority for imposing the same) to which school-boy flesh is heir.

Now, however, a complete metamorphosis had taken place, and the Ogre had suddenly changed into the Wise Magician, a magician full of the most wonderful tales for the soothing of tired brains—tales which would carry

you in one jump from Baghdad to Borneo, or from France to Fairyland.

When at last the cure was complete, and Angel-Face was fit and well again, he and his new-found friend had their first great tussle of wills. The Wise Magician wanted to take his pupil upon his magic carpet and show him in person some of the places they had visited in spirit, thereby acquiring much-needed health for both body and mind. The boy heard another call which he couldn't resist.

"I'd sure like to hit the trail with you for a partner, sir," said he, "but the very first thing I've got to do is to get right away in the bush by myself. I feel I just HAVE to; it's the only one thing that will pull me right back on the track again."

"Very well," replied his companion, "Let us avoid the towns by all means and keep entirely to the country."

"I'm real sorry, sir," said the lad, "but even that's no manner of use for my purpose. I sure do hate to say anything that sounds like ingratitude, but if I'm to get my reason back just as she was, I've got to go my own gait in a brand new pasture—and I've GOT to go it—alone."

This proved to be the end of the long battle, and Angel-Face won.

"Very well," said the other. "But never forget what I told you before, and what we will now touch upon for the very last time. That in all this miserable business that we've gone through together, there are just two things of which I am absolutely certain. The one is that Devereaux didn't take the money, and the other is that you are equally innocent. It may be that you are quite right in wanting to get away by yourself, and I shall therefore only beg of you to remember that no matter where you are or what trouble you may happen to get into, you've always got a friend to come to as long as I'm alive. And now, good-bye, dear lad. God bless you!"

And so Angel-Face found himself free to carry out his long-formed plan of exploring the English "bush," eschewing everything in the shape of civilization for just as long as ever he felt like it.

He had already arranged to have plenty of loose money at his command, and now the first thing to which he turned his attention was to get hold of a real good pony upon whose trusty back he might sally forth like the knights of old, to seek adventure and acquire merit.

With this end in view, he interviewed the proprietor of the local livery stable and stated

his requirements. The said proprietor had, of course, the very thing to suit him (whoever heard of a horse-dealer who hadn't?) and assuming that his young client was nothing more than a pretty spoilt child with lots of pocket money to spend, he proceeded to receive the shock of his life. For it was very shortly evident that this same child knew just as much about the points of a horse as he himself did, and he was positively shocked at a vocabulary even more comprehensive than his own.

At last, in despair, the dealer parted with his best pony at a price nearly two-thirds less than he originally asked, together with a second animal for a pack horse at a figure his owner described as "fair criminal." The saddle presented insurmountable difficulties, for Mr. Hames was positive that, short of sending to London for it, a stock saddle could not be had for love nor money. There was nothing else left, therefore, except to take an English hunting saddle and get used to it.

Angel-Face got his light outfit together in a few hours, threw a diamond hitch over the lot, and started on his travels. The sensation that was caused in the towns by a strange little being sitting a perfect little pony as though he was part of the beast itself, and leading

another animal laden with a pack, very soon decided the boy to abandon the cities altogether and strike across country on every occasion.

It was more than a week before he came across anything like what he was looking for. By that time, he struck a large stretch of wooded country with quite a good-sized stream running through it, and the sight of a couple of nice trout snapping at the flies under the overhanging willows decided him that this was the identical spot upon which to pitch his camp.

Angel-Face's ignorance of such things as manorial and riparian rights, the laws of trespass and all that appertains thereto, was simply colossal; and as for the trout in the stream being any one man's particular property, or that the timber all about him was not free for any traveller to cut, the thing never even entered his head. So he made his camp, pitched his fly (he carried no tent), cut the brush for his bed, watered and tethered his horses in the workmanlike manner instilled into him by his father. Any old-timer blowing into this camp would have recognized at once the hand of an expert.

It was shortly after five before everything was fixed according to his liking, the fire nicely

started and the billy ready to boil when called upon. The sight of the empty frying-pan seemed to cry aloud for the companionship of one of the aforesaid trout, so Angel-Face cut a switch, affixed thereto line, hook and grasshopper, and promptly proceeded to remedy the deficiency.

There it was, in the very act of landing a nice plump two-pounder, that the Marquis of Devereaux found him. As a matter of fact, he had been a most interested spectator for the last ten minutes, watching the very business-like poacher with much amusement. Now he came forward and addressed the culprit.

"You seem to be having good sport."

"Well," said Angel-Face, "I shouldn't exactly call it sport, but I've got a hy-u supper anyway. Some fish that," he said pleasantly, holding up his capture.

"Quite a nice fish," said the Marquis, "almost a pound and a half, I should say."

"Bet cher it's nearer two pounds," returned the other.

"I shouldn't be at all surprised," was the amused reply.

"Best thing YOU can do, stranger," went on the hospitable angler, "is to stick around for about fifteen minutes, and I'll give you one of the best meals you ever et."

Now his Lordship had started out early in the morning, thoroughly intending to be back for lunch, but in going from one place to another he had gone much farther than he had intended, and having had nothing to eat since breakfast, and scenting an entirely novel experience, he did not hesitate to accept some of his own fish, as prepared by this novel and picturesque poacher.

"I shall be delighted," he said.

"That's fine," said Angel-Face. "I'll spread myself now I've got a visitor. I'm some cook, believe me, although I do say it as shouldn't. Here, catch hold," he cried, throwing over a dipper to the other's feet. "Just fill er up with water, will you. I'll want some soon in a hurry."

With a feeling that this was even better than he expected and that Life still held some surprises in her lucky-tub, my Lord Marquis of Devereaux, Earl of St. Omar, and Lord of Long Strafford, went on his hands and knees and did as he was bid.

In what seemed to him to be an incredibly short time, an excellent meal appeared as by some conjuring trick, and the product called by his host "a biscuit"—although quite unlike the article known to his Lordship by that name—was a revelation.

What with the almost perfect coffee, the fish done to a hair's turn, and an appetite crying out to be satisfied, the owner of the ground on which they sat never remembered when he had enjoyed a meal so much. He did not hesitate to say so.

"I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you. I was evidently much more hungry than I knew and your most excellent food was just precisely what I wanted."

"Glad to have you," said Angel-Face. "Lucky you happened along. Going far?"

"A matter of about seven miles," said his Lordship.

"Oh, then you're just there," replied Angel-Face. "I was going to say, if you'd got a long trail ahead of you, you're welcome here as long as you want."

The application of "just there" to an unpleasantly long seven miles, scarcely appealed to his hearer, but he took it as if it was just the other side of the stream.

"Thanks very much for your hospitality," he said, pulling out a well-worn briar and proceeding to fill it, "but as you say, I'm 'just there,' so I'll just smoke half a pipe to digest that most excellent meal, and then I'll be on my way back. You seem to have made your-

self pretty comfortable here," he added, taking in the details of the camp.

"Oh, Shucks," said Angel-Face, "you're only pulling my leg. I only blew in here this morning and haven't had time to get fixed properly. You mosey along here about next week and I'll show you a **REAL** camp."

"So you are thinking of making a long stay?" was the polite enquiry.

"Well, I haven't rightly sized up the situation yet," replied the boy, "but I surely like this pitch—what I've seen of it—and if only I don't find a city back of each one of them trees there, which seems to be the rule in this country, I figure I'll stay some maybe."

"Well, I think I can satisfy you there," said the other: "the nearest city in that direction is—"

"Stop, right there," cried Angel-Face. "Don't you go and bust up all I've done. I don't want to know where the next City is. I'm through with cities. That's been my trouble. It's cost me more worry trying to get lost in this garden patch they call England than ever it did to find my way in God's own country."

"Oh, don't let me upset your plans on any account," said his companion, "I promise not

to impart any information unless called upon."

"Good, that suits me fine. You see," went on the lad confidentially, "I've been having a rough-house with Old Man Brain Fever; he mixed it up so wicked that I nearly took the count."

"Sounds most depressing," said his mystified hearer.

"Yes, SIR, nearly depressed me under the grass roots. However, I staggered up just before the gong sounded and beat the undertaker to it by a good ten seconds."

"Rather too close to be pleasant, eh?"

"Bet cher. I don't want any more in mine, so I reckoned I'd better beat it while the beating's good, and get out into the open, where a man can fill his lungs with good clean air that's not one part oxygen and nine parts coal-dust."

"That seems to be a very wise precaution," said the Marquis. "And as I know this part of the world pretty thoroughly, I may be of some assistance to you. Don't hesitate to make use of me."

"Now that's what I call real friendly," said Angel-Face. "How long before you hit the back trail?"

The Marquis looked down at the quaint little

figure busily tidying up his camp, and promptly replied:

"Tomorrow I shall certainly be back again, when I hope to see some more of you."

"Sure I'll be right glad to have you," replied Angel-Face. "Any man who's as good company as you are, is all to the merry with me."

"That's a bargain then. We meet tomorrow," said his Lordship.

"Make it a date," replied the boy. "So long."

The estate upon which our hero had planted his camp was one of the many belonging to the family of Devereaux, and was known as "The Friary." The house itself was of little or no value, being merely the picturesque but quite uninhabitable ruins of what was once the largest monastery in that part of England. The timber that surrounded it, however, was as fine a stand as could be found anywhere, and it was with the object of valuing this asset and obtaining therefrom the necessary funds to tide him over an immediate financial crisis, that the Marquis was now visiting the property; and although it hurt him horribly to have to destroy the grand old trees which could never be replaced, there was absolutely no help for

it. Every other negotiable security had been realized long ago, and it had been with the utmost difficulty that the head of the House of Devereaux had avoided so long the abyss of bankruptcy. Even the timber when sold would provide only a stop-gap at best, but such as it was, it had to be provided, and provided in a hurry.

Having risen every morning and lain down every night with these hideous money worries, month after month, year after year, each move in the game bringing him nearer a disaster which had far more terrors for him than death itself, the Marquis welcomed his encounter with Angel-Face as a positive God-send. He would not have believed it possible that the gloom that had surrounded him so long could be so completely—if temporarily—expelled by nothing more exciting than an encounter in his own woods. But the fascination which surrounded the strange little being he had just been with, got a strange hold of this thoroughly case-hardened man of the world, and he reached the bailiff's house in which he was staying (the only house fit for occupation on the estate) looking forward like a schoolboy to the coming of the morrow.

That same morrow found Angel-Face up

betimes, and having first provided his breakfast by the simple process of extracting another speckled beauty from the stream, he himself plunged therein for half-an-hour's perfect enjoyment.

The ponies watered and tethered in fine fresh feed, left him strolling round his lordly domain with a feeling that all was indeed well with the world, and with himself in particular.

A rustle in the underbrush made him dive for his .22, and a cautious stalk through the nearby bracken resulted in his killing the plumpest of plump cock pheasants. A wonderfully beautiful bird he was, reared as only a pheasant can be reared in the glorious woods of England. The flashes of color that scintillated from his plumage whenever the sun's rays struck it, so attracted the boy that he hung the bird where he could see it from his seat, and felt that he would never tire of looking at it.

"Gee, you are surely some chicken," he mused. "If you only taste half as good as you look, I'll have to get to know your family better."

Not wishing to get too far away from camp, lest he should miss his companion of the night before, he pottered about, fixing up a dozen

little things to make his quarters more comfortable.

While he was in the middle of these domestic labors, he was interrupted by the advent of the most extraordinary dog he had ever seen—a gigantic St. Bernard of the true Barri breed (a dog seldom seen away from their home in the Swiss Alps). This grand creature stood gravely regarding the admiring boy. As fine a specimen as the canine race has to show.

"Oh, you . . . peach!" murmured Angel-Face.

As if that exclamation completely satisfied him that the biped in front was to be treated in a friendly manner, the big dog slowly walked up to him, sat down and solemnly offered his right paw.

"Well . . . I'll . . . be . . . everlastingly . . . siwashed," whispered the boy, who took the great paw in both his hands and gravely remarked: "Howdy, partner? I sure am pleased ter meet yer."

And that was the picture that greeted the Marquis as he came through the brush: the huge dog flapping his great tail on the turf and slobbering with evident delight at the weird little being with the capacity of a man,

and the face of an Angel fairly beaming with admiration.

"Good morning, mine host," greeted his Lordship. "I see that my dog has decided that you are a good man and true, and fit to be numbered amongst his friends."

"D'you mean to tell me," said the boy slowly, still gazing into the beast's face, "that this here four-footed human being is a DOG?"

"So it has always been supposed; of course, that supposition may be wrong."

"You bet it's wrong, dead wrong; that ain't no dog. No, sir; that's just a pal. Ain't you, old sport?"

And in perfectly understandable dog-language, the reply came back: "Sure thing."

So hard a thing is heredity to get rid of, that the sight of a cock pheasant hanging on a stick out of season caused the owner thereof quite a shock, but not for all the pheasants in the covers would he have had it observed. He now remarked:

"If you've nothing better to do, what do you say to a voyage of discovery in the immediate vicinity. I can show you some wonderful views, and tell you anything you may want to know."

"I say; you're on," said Angel-Face

promptly. "And what's the matter with taking the ponies? We don't need to hit any gait at all, but it's millions of years since I felt a pony between my knees and I hate to miss the chance."

"By all means," said the Marquis; "but have you got a second saddle? I don't see one."

"No, sir. Strictly speaking, I ain't got no saddle at all, because you can't call that pad of pig's hide a saddle, can you? But if you can make out on it we'll do fine."

While he'd been speaking, Angel-Face had thrown his own saddle on the larger of the two ponies, and tossed a blanket on the other one.

"There," said he: "if old Bess can hold up under your hundred and eighty-nine pounds, I guess we're all O.K."

"That was an excellent guess; that's practically what I weigh," said the other.

"Thought it was there or thereabouts," cried the boy, jumping on to his pony. "Now, Mr. Guide, lead on."

And during the ensuing ride (which was the first of many they took together) the Marquis never remembered to have enjoyed himself more. The variety of Angel-Face's knowledge never ceased to be an ever present surprise,

while his complete ignorance of the most ordinary matters was almost equally entertaining.

Taking a tip from his companion, his Lordship carefully refrained from asking for any personal information, particularly for an exchange of names, it being quite evident that his nomadic tenant viewed unfavorably any allusions thereto. The nearest approach to the identification of either of them came when they pulled up at the bailiff's house for lunch, and Angel-Face, looking approvingly over the fields in front of him, said:

"You certainly have some ranch here."

"Oh," replied the Marquis, thinking of the many mortgages plastered all over those fair meadows, "really, I'm only looking after the property for the owner."

Now, he quite realized that in saying this he might—indeed he must—mislead the boy into thinking he was really a sort of bailiff, but for the life of him he couldn't bring himself to mention the true facts, lest in so doing he should break the careless association he found so intensely interesting.

"Say, partner," said Angel-Face, "what are those big white rings round the trees for?"

The Marquis hesitated before answering,

then he said sadly: "They are sorting out the good timber from the bad. Before long it will all be cut."

"CUT!" cried Angel-Face. "Did you say CUT? What the Sam Hill is the owner of this ranch thinking of? Ain't he got enough cleared land down by the creek, surely he don't want to clear any more."

"No, my lad, he doesn't," returned his companion. "But he does want the money that these trees will bring him, and he must have it to save some other property. I assure you he doesn't want to do it."

"Gosh, that's plumb criminal; why, there ain't no bush like this in a week's ride. I know 'cos I couldn't find any." Suddenly the boy wheeled round on him. "Say? What do you do in this country when you want to buy timber?"

"Go to a broker; there's one of his men now with a note-book in his hand."

Angel-Face took a good look at the man to be sure he'd recognize him again, and was strangely silent all the way home.

The next morning he hunted this man up and got from him the name and address of the timber broker. Then he rode into the nearest town and sent a long wire to his friend the

lawyer. Two days later he received the following: "Timber seems excellent buy at the price. Quite advise purchase. Will proceed at once. Weatherley."

Angel-Face heaved a sigh of relief on receipt of the wire, and anxiously awaited the return of the Marquis, who had had to go away on business. But somehow or another the days went on and his companion did not return, much to Angel-Face's disappointment.

CHAPTER IV

THE SPIDER'S WEB

Seated in his luxuriously upholstered office in Lincoln's Inn Fields, Israel Levison was busily scheming how he could best attain his heart's desires.

Born at the back of a fried-fish shop in Aldgate, he had so well applied the extraordinary brains with which he had been gifted that now at an age well under forty, he had made himself quite a power in the City of London, and was rapidly forcing himself into the very front financial rank.

Like so many of his race, he possessed the money-sense in a marked degree, and he had very successfully employed it to acquire what most men would call a princely fortune, but what Israel looked upon as but a mere stepping-stone to real wealth.

He was now engaged upon what he knew to be the fight of his life, and just because he was opposed by forces not always vulnerable to the battery of pounds, shillings and pence, he felt the need of all his cunning, and realized

the necessity of playing the strong cards, that he already held, without making a single slip if he hoped to emerge the victor.

Nature had been very good to Israel in the matter of appearance. There was nothing blatantly Jewish about him. Everything that a shrewd intelligence could correct, had been corrected. In the matter of jewelry, for instance (which his soul loved), he was a veritable Stoic, and because he could not trust himself to keep within the strictest bounds, he eschewed it altogether.

Nobody knew his limitations better than he did, which made him extremely dangerous as an enemy.

He felt now that the time had come when he could proceed more or less safely to the accomplishment of his Life's ambition, viz: an unqualified recognition by Society.

By this he did not simply mean the *entré* to a few good—if somewhat mixed—Clubs and the easy fellowship of the golf-course or the paddock, but the REAL thing—the RIGHT to receive and accept invitations to the best houses in the land. And this he very well knew could only be obtained by a judicious marriage. With this object in view he had thoroughly trained himself on lines the very

reverse of those usually followed by others of his class. As far as his outward life was concerned, he had endeavored to hide the "financier" altogether. As soon as his means had allowed it, he had worked like a slave to acquire a proficiency in such sports as would be most useful to him. Always as a matter of business, never as a matter of pleasure. As a golfer, a horseman, and a shot he was excellent, and as the man himself really took no interest in any of these things, he retained his skill by sheer hard work.

His two weak points were vanity and a habit of playing safe—too safe, very often, for it had occasionally happened that while he was verifying particulars and trying to make his position safer still, some bolder spirit closed the deal and took the profit.

Such was the man who had fixed upon the House of Devereaux to supply his needs. Already many of the mortgages were in his hands, and his Agents were everywhere trying to get hold of more. He didn't for a moment rely upon so crude a scheme as foreclosure and bankruptcy to gain his ends, but rather upon a tactful and timely assistance which might bring about by gratitude what otherwise would be scared away by force.

Of course, if the Marquis, in spite of all, should persist in riding the high horse and positively refuse to be helped by Mr. Levison, why, then it might be advisable to change the method of attack. In furtherance of his schemes, he had bought a comfortable shooting-box adjoining the principal Devereaux estate of Torrington Towers; and very cleverly never going near the place, except when he knew the big house was empty, for he was determined that when he did go into residence there should be no question about his being received by his neighbors.

To-day he had asked (commanded, would be perhaps more correct) a mutual acquaintance to arrange a meeting with the Marquis at a Sporting Club to which they all three belonged. Having reviewed all his forces and found them all in order, he now strolled down to keep the appointment.

As he walked through the Club Hall, he saw his emissary talking to two other men, one of whom he knew to be Lord Devereaux.

Taking particular care not to pay any attention to them, he heard himself accosted (as he knew he would be) with:

"Hello, Levison, glad to see you. Where in the world have you been all this time?

Haven't seen you since Ascot. I think you all know each other? No? Devereaux, let me introduce Mr. Levison—he's got a place somewhere in your neighborhood. Capt. Moorhouse, Mr. Levison. Now, don't start talking golf, you two, or we'll never get any lunch. You'll join us, Levison?"

"Thanks, I would like to; I'll be with you in a minute."

And Levison went to leave his things in the cloak-room, chalking up a good mark to the friend who had passed over so smoothly an introduction he had schemed to obtain for months.

"Who did you say your friend was, George?" said Capt. Moorhouse when the Jew was out of hearing.

"Levison. I wonder you haven't heard of, if not met, him. He's one of the best amateur golfers we've got. He might have gone near winning the Championship lots of times, if he wasn't so beastly modest. And as for partridges, he's the very best man at driven birds I've ever seen."

"Looks as fit as hands can make him," commented the Captain.

"He's certainly the best dressed man I've seen for a long time," said the Marquis; and

he felt rather ashamed of himself for wondering whether Mr. Levison wasn't just a little bit **TOO** well dressed.

Israel had spent far too many weary years of hard study not to be a first-class conversationalist, hitting the right note to a nicety with each of the two strangers and proving himself an authority on all the subjects they touched upon. The Captain thought he was quite the best company he had come across in many a day, and made a note (subject to enquiry) to invite him for the opening of the grouse shooting. The Marquis was quite annoyed with himself for feeling antagonistic to so pleasurable a companion, and laid himself out to be extra nice in consequence.

Under the guidance of the "mutual friend" they took their coffee in the Billiard room, and while he and the Captain were engaged in a game, Israel was left a free hand with the Marquis.

"I wonder whether I might bother you for information about my shooting," said Levison. "You may remember that I join on to you at the bottom of your big copse?"

"By Jove!" cried the other, "so **YOU** are the mysterious owner of the best shoot in the County! Upon my word, I never connected

you up until this minute, in spite of George saying you came from our part of the Country."

"I'm afraid I can't claim that distinction," said the Jew frankly. "One can't be said to belong to any part of the country just because you buy a place in it. I bought it because I'm dead keen on shooting, and Torrington seemed to be the best going. I'd be eternally grateful to you if you'd tell me the best way to work it."

As Mr. Levison very well knew, the Marquis was one of the best shots in the land, and never so happy as when he had a gun in his hand. In this instance he never dreamt of resisting the appeal, and plunged at once into the fascinating subject in that whole-hearted manner in which he did everything, including spending the income that he didn't possess. Before long, his Lordship had not only arranged what ought to be done, but enthusiastically offered to see it carried out.

"It's really awfully good of you," said Levison, "but I can't possibly manage anything more than flying visits, or give it the proper attention."

Many a man would have committed the mistake of making his Lordship free of the shooting itself. Not so Mr. Levison—his methods

were far more subtle. He now touched upon the REAL object of the interview, and continued:

"Oddly enough, I nearly took a look at another place of yours, 'The Friary,' I think it was called. More land, but not such good shooting, if I remember rightly."

"Nothing like as good. Not to be mentioned in the same day," said the Marquis.

"I think my man mentioned some very excellent timber," said Mr. Levison doubtfully.

As he himself had thoroughly examined the whole property twice, this seemed a pretty safe statement to make.

"There is indeed," replied his companion. "Unfortunately it won't be there long. I'm offering it for sale now."

"What a beastly shame!" burst out the other; then, appearing to recover himself, he said soberly: "I beg your pardon. I'd absolutely no business to appear to criticise your action, but forestry is almost a disease with me. It positively hurts me to think of the depletion of our grand old woods. I'd do almost anything to stop it."

His acting was the most natural thing in the world. No one would have dreamt, to look at him, that the making into firewood of

all the forests in England would have left Israel Levison unmoved.

"So would I," sadly said the Marquis. "Unfortunately, I've simply got to turn it into money."

"I wonder whether I might make a suggestion?" questioned Levison diffidently.

"By all means."

"It has just flashed through my mind that this property might suit a great personal friend of mine. I know he's looking out for one. It's possible that he might enter into some arrangement of purchase which would help you and at the same time enable him to keep the place intact. Of course, it's only an idea," he added hastily, "but I really think something might be made of it . . . if you are agreeable?"

"Such a thing would be a God-send to me. I'd gladly do anything to save the place."

The Jew paused a moment in what seemed to be a perfectly natural hesitation, and then added:

"It must seem awfully cheeky of me, after a bare two hours' acquaintance, to interfere with your affairs, but, really, it's a hobby of mine, this preserving of old estates, and anything that I can do is freely at your service."

“My dear sir,” said the truly grateful nobleman, “please don’t apologize. If you can do as you suggest, I can never thank you enough.”

“I’ll certainly do what I can,” returned the Jew. “By the way, where can I find you if I want to communicate with you?”

And the Marquis gave Mr. Levison every address and every facility for meeting him at any time, together with an open invitation to visit him whenever he felt like it.

CHAPTER V

ONE OF THE UPPER TEN

About the time that Angel-Face had closed his timber deal, he had also written a long letter to the Wise Magician, telling him where he was and how fit he was feeling. In reply he got a glorious epistle, full of all kinds of interesting details, and a friendly sympathy so generously expressed that the lonely lad almost felt that he had got a home. Enclosed in the letter was the following note from Devils:

“DEAR OLD ANGEL:

“So glad to hear from the Old Man that you are fit and well again. Go to it, old son, let the good work continue. Now you just listen to this and file it away for future reference: Stay in your jolly old bush just as long as ever you feel like it, BUT—and here is the kernel of the matter—if you don’t find your way to us for Christmas and take up your winter quarters at Torrington, I won’t believe

you ever really wanted the friendship of—Devils.”

As the weather got colder and colder, and miserably wet, Angel-Face remembered this letter, and turned his ponies' heads towards Torrington Towers, thoroughly looking forward to seeing old Devils again, and feeling that he could now stand a little civilization without taking much harm.

Although he had, of course, noticed and admired many of the beautiful mansions that he had passed on his journeys through the country, somehow or other he never associated them with the kind of house in which his school friend lived. Devils had always so impressed upon him how poor his father was, that Angel-Face had unconsciously pictured the Marquis and Devils and his two sisters—one older and one younger than himself—doing their own chores and just making a living, very much like the struggling Canadian farmer he knew so well. So much so, that the brilliant idea struck him of taking along with him a good fat turkey for the Christmas dinner, and with this hospitable intent, he purchased the best bird to be had for money, just outside the gates of Torrington Towers, on the morning of Christmas Eve.

Now, it had always been the custom of the North Brackenshire Hunt to hold the Christmas meet on the lawn of the Towers, and there in all the bravery of buckskin and pink they were now assembled, waiting only for the advent of the Master and the Marquis before making a start.

In the Hunt annals, religiously kept since the day of its formation, many and strange incidents were duly recorded; so varied indeed were these that it did not seem possible that anything really novel could be added thereto.

This view, however, was knocked to smithereens in the next five minutes.

The second whip noticed Angel-Face first when he was a quarter of a mile away, and everybody urged their horses forward to get a better look.

They saw the bright little figure, simply radiating health, with the head of a miniature Greek god and the bearing of a Centaur—clothed as to the upper half of him merely in a flannel shirt, and that wide open at the neck—seated in a Mexican Stock saddle (Angel-Face had long since procured one), with a huge turkey hanging on the one side and a cow-boy's rope hanging on the other, followed patiently by a pony carrying a pack half as

big as itself. 'Twas thus that Canada introduced her son to his fox-hunting cousins.

Old Tom Gibbs, the huntsman, rode forward and asked if he could be of any assistance.

"Sure Mike," said Angel-Face. "Looks as if I'd got bushed somehow—maybe you can put me wise—and if you folks are going right back to the tent, I'll just tag along and water my ponies."

"Tent, zurr? We baint got no tent," said old Tom.

"Well, I never heard of a circus without a tent before," said Angel, "but a man never knows what they'll do in this country. Anyway, I'm looking for the Devereaux shack. Have I got far to go?"

At that, the most radiant being he had ever seen outside of a circus, came up and asked if she could help him.

"It's real good of you, marm," said the boy. "I'm on a still hunt for a family named Devereaux—friends of mine."

The beautiful lady raised her whip and pointed to the pile of masonry before which they stood.

"Your friends live there," she said.

The lad's eyes opened wider and wider and

gazed in wonderment at the Castle in front of him. Frances Errington, looking at the upturned face, thought she had never seen so perfect a picture.

"Won't you come in and see them?" said she. "They are all at home."

But, for once in his life, Angel-Face was completely nonplussed. All his previous ideas were bowled over in hopeless confusion and he felt his very foundations rocking.

The arrival of Devils saved the situation.

"Whoop-ee," he cried, running up and wringing the other's limp hand. "If it isn't the dear old Angel himself! Buck up, old horse! You've come to the end of the trail all right."

"Is . . . is . . . this your ranch?" came the timid enquiry.

"It sure is, my son. You've got to come right in and get acquainted."

The old familiar language restored the boy as nothing else could, and he slipped off his pony and walked towards the broad flight of stone steps leading up to the house.

Before he could quite recover himself, down these same steps came another vision that threatened once more to knock him end-ways. For the big handsome man coming straight

down towards him, and dressed in the same fancy circus costume, was none other than his old friend, the bailiff.

"Dad," called Devils, "I've got him at last. Permit me to make known to you my school-fellow and very good friend, Julius P. Bowles, better known as 'Angel-Face.'"

"Well met, mine ancient host," said the Marquis quietly. Then, taking the boy's hand in both his own, he added earnestly: "Welcome, dear lad, we are all delighted to see you."

Angel-Face was far too dazed to say anything more than: "Thank you, very much."

"Take him in, Phil, and make him happy. I prophesy the best Christmas we've had for years. Why, bless me," he added. "Who's the turkey for?"

"Well I . . . I . . . sorter thought she might help out with the dinner some," stammered Angel.

"And so it will, my lad, so it will," exclaimed the Marquis. "Phil, you see to it that we have that bird and no other for tomorrow's dinner."

"Righto," said Devils. "Now you be off, Dad. They are all waiting for you. I'll see to Angel and show him round the wigwam."

And with a cheery wave of the hand, the Marquis joined the already moving huntsmen.

To the exclusion of all else, Angel watched the tall figure until it had ridden out of sight. Just why he didn't there and then tell Devils of his previous meeting with his father, he never could have explained; but the fact remains that either through sheer amazement, or because of his natural secrecy, he did not say anything about it.

CHAPTER VI

THE ENEMY DEPLOYS

The family of which Angel-Face now found himself a member consisted of the Marquis, his son Phillip, and his two daughters, Barbara and Kathleen, aged nineteen and fifteen respectively.

The Marchioness having died when the elder girl was fourteen years old, Barbara, under the able guidance of old Mrs. Hudson, the housekeeper, had at once begun to handle the reins of household management. For years the neighborhood had derived much innocent entertainment out of watching the evolution of this child-hostess, gravely receiving her father's guests and gradually filling the place left so terribly vacant by her mother's death. So well had she trained herself for the position, that now, at the age of nineteen only, she was unanimously regarded as one of the most competent and charming hostesses in the County.

Barbara Devereaux, when Angel-Face first knew her, was a tall, slim, dark girl, who appeared to have in her veins not one single

drop of the wild Irish blood that was so characteristic of the rest of her family. By no means devoid of a sense of humor, it was yet expressed in so quiet and dry a manner that Barbara seemed a more solemn person than she really was.

Kathleen, on the other hand, was the very opposite of her sister. In her own opinion, Nature had treated her very scurvily in not creating her a boy. Since the very first day she could toddle on her own two feet, she had done her level best (aided, it must be admitted, by a doting Father) to forget, if not altogether to correct, that fact. As yet the child was not old enough to make her mode of existence impossible. Her frank boyish ways had, until now, always been a source of delight to the large circle of more or less selfish friends, who were only too glad to spoil the pretty child, if by so doing they could extract for themselves a passing amusement.

To Israel Levison "Kit" (and to a minor extent her brother Phillip) represented the breach in the wall through which he hoped to enter the very heart of the Citadel he intended to attack, and finally enable him to secure, by fair means or foul, the hand of the stately Barbara for his own.

With a patience that few people would have given him credit for, he had devoted a lot of his time to the child and her brother, improving their golf out of all knowledge, and riding and shooting with them whenever they called on him. He had wasted no time in accepting the Marquis' invitation, and, pleading a much-needed holiday, had taken up his residence in Brackenshire. There, at what he called his "cottage," but which was in fact a most perfectly fitted modern residence, Phillip, and, more particularly, Kit, ran in and out as it pleased them, and had got to look upon Mr. Levison as a kind of *Deus ex machina* to supply their every sporting need.

Such was the situation when Angel-Face came upon the scene.

In accordance with the ancient custom of their House, the entire Devereaux family attended matins at the village church on Christmas morning, and Angel (who had taken the precaution of having his School kit forwarded to Torrington) took part in this, to him, entirely novel ceremony.

After service, they were joined by Mr. Levison, who, with Kit on one side and Devils on

the other, arranged to take their guns and walk through the covers after lunch.

Angel-Face was at once introduced to the Jew and, of course, included in the arrangement. From the very first moment that Kit had wrung the boy's somewhat nervous hand, a bond of companionship had been established between them. The boy had been kept busy practically ever since, satisfying the innumerable questions about Western life demanded by his inquisitor. In spite of many forcible protests from Devils, Kit had, to all intents and purposes, monopolized Angel-Face altogether and her brother found himself playing a very poor third in the subsequent proceedings.

On starting out after lunch, Devils offered to provide Angel with a twelve-bore such as he himself carried, but the latter, saying that he "wasn't on to this kind of hunting," preferred to take his own trusty .22, which by this time he had got to know to a nicety. Scatter guns were not *de rigueur* in the land where Angel-Face had learnt his shooting, and a man was not considered to be able to shoot at all who could not hit all he wanted to with a single bullet. They met Mr. Levison at the end of the paddock and all started off merrily enough.

The Jew's plans had, up until now, gone on oiled wheels. Everything that he had intended had been accomplished, and he had even established just the right relationship with Barbara; a perfectly easy and friendly association, upon which he could gradually rise to a warmer feeling when the time should seem ripe. On one point only he had been somewhat nervous, but even that had apparently turned out to his advantage. It was discovered, when his agent tried to purchase the Friary timber, that the sale had already been completed, and, in spite of all his extensive enquiries, he could not discover the name of the buyer. The Marquis, however, had never doubted that the business had been carried through by Israel's agency and the Jew had thought it safe to assume a credit to which he was not entitled. That was his first mistake, and he did it with his eyes open, trusting to time and the cementing of his friendship with the family to set it all right at some future date.

He now committed his second and even greater error, and in this case had not the very faintest idea that he had done it. The advent of Angel-Face was not at all to his liking, providing as it did a sort of counter-attraction to himself. He shrewdly foresaw that with this

novel and picturesque playmate, his own hold upon Kit and Phillip was in danger of being lessened, if not over-shadowed entirely. With a feeling of distinct annoyance at the boy's presence, he was fool enough to let that annoyance show itself in occasional sarcastic comment, which left Angel simply boiling with a desire to "get even with this smooth guy." Had Mr. Levison's audience been grown-up folk, his habitual guard upon his tongue would probably have kept him from expressing his irritation quite so freely; but in the presence of the children, he allowed himself to relax and gave a free rein to his annoyance.

It worried him to look at Angel's very outfit. It was so extremely businesslike compared with his own perfectly cut sporting tweeds, from the well-worn Stetson to the high laced boots pulled on over serviceable over-alls, to say nothing of the thick flannel shirt (minus a coat) and more than all, the big leather belt with its hunting-knife attached.

"I hope your friend won't catch cold, Phillip," he said unpleasantly, "I see he has forgotten his coat."

"Don't you worry any, stranger," said Angel, "I'll get through all right."

"I'm sure I hope so," said Mr. Levison

testily, "because while you are with me I am responsible for your safety."

Angel-Face opened his eyes wide at this unique suggestion and said: "Wal, that's the very first time I ever had a nurse in the bush, but it's real good of you," he added gravely.

Mr. Levison looked down sharply to see if the other were cheeking him, but could gather nothing from the boy's calm face.

"Mark over," cried Kit, as she and Phillip let drive both barrels at a few scattered birds, who scurried away untouched.

"That wasn't like you, Kit," said Mr. Levison. "All those birds were well out of range."

To hear the Jew address the little figure at his side as "Kit," gave Angel-Face the most unpleasant sensation he ever remembered. Of course, when he came to think of it, there was no earthly reason why she should not be addressed by her Christian name, particularly by a man old enough to be her father, and, for all he knew, some sort of a relation besides. But, nevertheless, the fact remained he didn't like it one little bit, and felt he'd love to drop that immaculate figure in some nice green, slimy pond.

"Look out!" called Mr. Levison. "You take the right bird, I'll take the left."

This he promptly proceeded to do, and seeing that Phil had again missed his bird, swung round and dropped it with his second barrel.

Now, the process of having your "eye wiped" is never a pleasant one at any time, even when the wippee knows that the wiper is far and away the better man. Phillip felt rather sore about it.

"Hard luck, old man," was Levison's comment. "I was a brute to do that, but I couldn't resist such a sporting shot."

Somehow or other, this explanation did not have quite the soothing effect it should have had. But this exhibition of his undoubted skill put the Jew in a much better temper, and he added pleasantly, "We mustn't go home without giving our young friend a chance of letting off his pop-gun. Suppose we go up on the side of the hill; we may find a sitting rabbit for him."

Kit was the only one to see Angel-Face bite his lip to suppress a reply, and so she ranged herself alongside and plied him with cheerful talk. Angel melted under this treatment and kept the girl in fits of laughter as they went through the woods. Suddenly, they were checked by Mr. Levison holding up his hand for silence. The dogs had evidently picked up

a scent and were creeping into the underbrush on their left.

They were now standing in the middle of a gloriously green ride, having high trees on either side of them. An ideal, if none too easy, place to come across a good strong rocketing pheasant.

"Let me have the first one if he comes out," whispered their host; "and you two take any others."

The whirr of a rising bird was now heard and a grand old cock shot up from the trees like a shell from a gun.

Two shots rang out in quick succession, but the bird went on unharmed. Then, one tiny crack of the .22 and down he came thundering out of the sky.

Kit and Phil were so intent on watching the Jew's performance that no one had noticed Angel-Face carefully covering the bird since it had first shown itself.

"Great Cæsar's Ghost!" cried Phil. "Do you often do that sort of thing?"

"Oh, good shot!" called Kit. "How on earth did you do it?"

"I was lucky," said Angel. "'Taint always easy when they get as far as that. I ain't never shot at birds with long tails before and it's apt to faze yer some."

Mr. Levison nearly did what he hadn't done for years, lost his temper. However, he checked himself in time.

"That was quite the most extraordinary shot I've ever seen. That is," he added, "if you were aiming at the bird."

"Wal, I wasn't exactly shooting at the acorns," drawled Angel. Kit burst out laughing, which didn't help to soothe the Jew.

"I am sure after that," he said slowly, "we shall none of us be satisfied until we see a further exhibition of your prowess."

"You've got me beat, stranger," replied the lad. "What sort of a bird is Prowess?"

Devils now saw that all was not well between the two, and jumped into the breach.

"Prowess, old horse, is the stunt they brought off in the golden days of chivalry. You remember King Arthur, the Round Table, Lancelot Galahad and those boys, Feats of Arms, Dering-do; that's Prowess."

"Oh, sure," said Angel. "That was the dandiest dope of all they handed round at Cranborough, only I didn't recognize the gent by his new name."

"Well," went on Phillip. "Luck or no luck, that sort of shooting is in a different class altogether from ours."

"It just depends what you're huntin' for," said Angel-Face. "When you know that a miss means no supper, you just have to pay some attention to yer shootin'."

For Mr. Levison, all the pleasure had gone out of the afternoon, and as they worked their way home again, he had all he could do to keep up his end of the conversation, and not show the hurt to his fatal vanity.

On getting back to his house, where they were to have tea, nothing would do for Kit and Phil but that Angel should shoot at a mark and initiate them into the mysteries of which he was master. Mr. Levison did not join them, but nevertheless gladly lent Phil his own .22 so that he might shoot against his friend. Kit's excited little face urged the boy to show what he really could do, and it was not long before they discovered that Angel-Face could often hit—and hit again—a mark that neither of the other two could even see when looking down the sights, and they came in to tea thoroughly determined to practice every day.

"*Au revoir*, sir," said Phil as they were leaving. "As you are coming to dinner with us tonight, we won't say good-bye."

"Holy Poker!" murmured Angel, when they got outside, "did you say that that gent was coming around tonight?"

"Why, yes," said Devils. "He's all by himself, and we asked him to Christmas dinner."

"Gee, that's fierce," moaned the other.

"Now, Angel," said Kit, "I may call you Angel, mayn't I?"

"Anything YOU say goes with me," said Angel.

"Then, Angel, you ought to know that Mr. Levison has been all kinds of a pal to Phil and me, and that really we like him awfully. I know he was simply beastly this afternoon, but he's never been like that before. Perhaps he isn't well," she added.

"Oh, Glory!" cried Angel. "Maybe he isn't and won't show up tonight."

"I didn't mean that," said Kit. "What I want you to do, to please me—to please us BOTH—is to try and be nice to him."

"Some contract," said Angel doubtfully, "but I'll have a stab at it. Now, before we get back in the crowd," said the lad, "I want you two to do something for ME."

"Sure thing," said Devils.

"Certainly," added Kit, slipping her arm through Angel's.

Now, never in his life had a girl's arm rested in his, and it came as quite a shock—quite a pleasurable shock—but a shock just the same.

He tucked it a little closer and it rather distracted his thoughts from what he was going to say. And as Kit smiled up at him and he smiled back, he felt he would be quite content to jog along that old turnpike road for a year or so at least, till Kit reminded him:

"What is it you want us to do?"

"Oh . . . er . . . yes . . . I got it . . . I want you two not to leave me cached away by myself while we're eating anything."

"What DO you mean?" said Devils.

"Wal," said Angel. "Up to now I've never had no quarrel with my victuals. Me and the grub-pile always had a kindly feelin' for each other, but that, I guess, is because we've been left to wrestle out our differences by ourselves. But in your shack—which is sure some shack all right—it seems as if you can't get away with a grub without three men and a boy to help yer do it."

"Proceed," said Devils.

"Now, I don't want ter hurt no one's feelin's," went on Angel, "but when I offered to do my share of washing up after breakfast, the old gent in the glad rags what does all the hard work didn't seem to take it friendly."

Kit was nearly bursting, but only held his arm the tighter.

"There's other things wot's got me beat four ways to the Jack; for instance, I ain't never had no trouble in drinking all I had a mind to out of one glass, if I wanted any more than one drink I just filled 'er up again. But that feller wouldn't let me be last night . . . gave me . . . five. Yes, sir . . . five. And everybody else had five too. They cluttered me all up, so I couldn't hardly move."

"It's only a silly old custom of the country," said Devils, "you'll soon get used to it."

"I ain't so durned well sure of that," said Angel dubiously. "But what I want you two to promise me is that one or the other of you will be right on deck in the cook-tent, so that if I flag-wag or make smoke signals, you'll weigh right in with the pass-word."

This finished Kit altogether, so she pretended to stumble, and in the confusion relieved a little of the pressure that threatened to explode there and then.

And so they arranged it. He should not be left alone until, as he expressed it, he had "had time to prospect the ledge and get located."

CHAPTER VII

CONSTERNATION IN THE COOK-TENT

For more years than the Marquis of Devereaux cared to think about, Christmas had been to him a season of nothing but artificial merriment. For the children's sake he had forced himself to keep up the old customs, and try and smile back at them in their enjoyment, all the time hugging the ghastly knowledge to himself that, unless a miracle happened, the very next Christmas might find them all turned out of their old home, and lucky if they possessed money enough to purchase a dinner of any kind.

But this year a Heaven-sent—if temporary—change had taken place. Thanks to the friend, who by selling the Friary timber so promptly had provided funds to tide over his immediate difficulties, Lord Devereaux felt comparatively happy, and a wealth of gratitude welled up within him towards the man whose kindly offices had brought all this about.

Mr. Levison himself had had ample time to revise his conduct of the afternoon, and quickly

decided that his attitude towards Angel-Face was altogether a mistake. He saw plainly enough that he was deliberately throwing away the advantage he possessed, and, although he felt still viciously sore with the young inter-loper who threatened to upset his carefully laid plans, he realized that his only successful line of action lay in assuming a friendly interest in the boy and awaiting such time as he could see his way clear to trap him into some foolishness and get rid of him completely, a process that quite comforted the Jew to contemplate.

During dinner, therefore, he had employed his really abnormal talents to making everything go smoothly, tactfully drawing out Angel on subjects in which the boy was interested, and leaving the latter positively bewildered how the charming companion of this evening and the bear of the afternoon could be one and the same person.

By carefully watching all that Devils did, and studiously copying him, Angel-Face was getting through the dinner in great shape. On the only two occasions when an impasse presented itself, a judicious stretching of the leg managed to find Kit's, and the situation had been saved. The second of these gymnastic

performances, however, had resulted in the losing of his shoe, which now reposed just out of reach under Kit's chair. He fervently hoped they would not all get up suddenly and leave groping or hobbling the only alternative.

Dessert had been put upon the table and the servants had all departed (much to Angel's relief) when the bombshell burst, giving the boy his first great object in life, and supplying him with a cause for which he never ceased to fight for many a year to come.

Kit had just passed him a dish of green looking sweetmeats resembling a plum, which the boy had grave hesitation in sampling. He had had a disastrous experience in the early part of dinner, when he had (following a lead from Devils) taken a little green oval plum and put it in his mouth. Now, except for one occasion when he swallowed a whole mouthful of sea-water, Angel never remembered tasting anything so particularly nasty, and he only just restrained himself from following Dr. Johnson's celebrated example, when he remarked: "Many a fool would have swallowed it." He was not debating whether or not this was a practical joke on Kit's part, when the Marquis bade them all fill up their glasses and drink to a toast.

"Children," said he, "I cannot let this opportunity escape without our drinking to the health of the best friend we've any of us had for many a long day. By disposing of the Friary timber so quickly and yet not sacrificing the trees themselves, he has placed us all under the deepest obligation."

To simply ask the floor to open and swallow you up was nothing to what Angel-Face prayed for. Anything short of continuing the journey right through to the Antipodes would not have answered his purpose a bit, now that he thought his secret had been discovered. He did not even hear the next few words, but was dumbfounded to receive a sharp kick on the shins from Kit to stand on his feet like the rest of them.

"Levison, my friend: Here's your very good health," said the Marquis.

Everybody murmured "Mr. Levison," and raised the glasses to their lips. Everybody that is, except Angel-Face. From wanting the world to open and swallow him, he now only desired it to stop spinning round and round. He stood quite still, steadily glaring at the now smiling Jew, and might easily have gone on thus standing and staring until further orders, if Kit had not yanked him by the coat-tails

back into his seat. He saw, as through a haze, Mr. Levison gracefully rise to his feet and say quietly:

"Lady Barbara, My Lord Marquis, dear children: Had I been able personally to render you any financial assistance, I should indeed be a proud man, as that is the one true test of friendship. Not the giving, but the accepting of help. But unfortunately, I haven't done any such thing. *I* didn't buy the Friary timber."

Nobody heard Angel murmur: "That's a fact."

"All I was able to do," continued the Jew, "was to induce my friend to do so."

Here the speaker was interrupted by Angel-Face apparently swallowing a chocolate whole and choking in the process. It was not until Kit had banged him on the back that Mr. Levison was able to conclude:

"I can only hope that if you feel I have been able to render you any service, you will give me my reward by calling on those services again."

Angel, having now recovered somewhat, decided it was about time that he stood into the game.

"Gee! that's sure some swell offer," said he earnestly.

The Marquis smiled.

"In his very apt language, our young friend from Canada has just exactly expressed what we all feel."

Mr. Levison inclined his head.

"Say, stranger," pursued Angel. "Did I get you right, that a FRIEND of yours pulled off that timber deal?"

"You did," replied Mr. Levison, smiling. "A great personal friend of mine."

"Is THAT so?" drawled the lad. Then turning to the Marquis, he added, "I'd sure like to know his name."

Mr. Levison began to feel in his bones that all was not quite as it should be.

"That," said his Lordship, "is something that Mr. Levison has never told us."

He made this statement with a note of interrogation that the Jew could not ignore.

"I'm afraid I didn't realize," said he, "that the name of the buyer was of any particular consequence. All my attention was entirely given to getting the deal successfully put through."

"I'd sure like to know his name," came the persistent enquiry.

"There's no real objection," replied the Jew, who by now was getting somewhat irritable.

"But I'm sure I shall be pardoned for my stupidity in failing to see the connection between this purely personal business and my young friend opposite."

"I can supply that," said the Marquis smiling. "And at the same time clear up a small secret that Master Bowles and I have in common." Here he adopted a mild Canadian accent. "He and I got acquainted, 'partners' I think we called ourselves (Angel nodded) during my stay at the Friary last summer, where he was camping for the sake of his health. Without knowing each other's identity, I think I may safely say that we foregathered to our mutual satisfaction, and had 'some' holiday together. What say you, partner?"

"Carried unanimously," said Angel-Face.

"You old clam," said Devils. "You never told me."

"And so you see," continued the Marquis. "My . . . er . . . partner, is naturally interested in the timber about which we talked so much."

"That quite explains everything," said Mr. Levison, feeling intensely relieved. "I shall be only too happy to give you the name of my friend, who is Cyrus Weatherley, the Solicitor of Old Burlington Street."

Kit was the only one who could see Angel clench his fist and hear him draw his breath between his teeth with a hiss. However, his answer was calm enough.

"Thank YOU! I'd sure like to meet Mr. Weatherley."

"Perhaps some day you'll have the opportunity," said the Jew more sharply than the occasion called for.

The fact was, that the utmost that his enquiries had yielded had been to lead the trail to Cyrus Weatherley's office, there to be cut off dead. It seemed safest therefore—indeed there was no option—to mention the only name he knew in connection with the whole transaction.

CHAPTER VIII

RED RAGS

Following on this encounter with a danger that he merely sensed, but did not in the least understand, the Jew redoubled his efforts to attract Angel-Face and gain the boy's confidence. In this, somewhat to his astonishment, he found less difficulty than he had anticipated. So that by degrees, as the months went by, he came to believe that he had exaggerated the incident of Christmas night.

He now determined to prosecute more vigorously his plans with regard to Lady Barbara.

Having previously ascertained from Angel that a parish meeting was likely to take her through the lower meadows, Mr. Levison took care to be in that neighborhood when Barbara made her return journey.

While there had been no definite declaration on the Jew's part, it was nevertheless quite obvious that he missed no opportunity of seeking Barbara's society, and also that she herself seemed quite content to have it so.

If the Marquis thought about the matter at

all, it was merely to decide that he could very well leave it in his daughter's capable hands, and that further, if there should exist any serious intentions on Levison's part, she might do very much worse in these trying and ultra-democratic days.

He had every confidence in all his children, and never worried them with overmuch advice, unless specially called upon, when everything that he possessed was theirs for the asking.

Barbara was quite familiar with her father's terrible financial position, of which he had never made any secret, and, with the ignorance of youth, had decided that the intense love she had for him—a love that sometimes almost seemed to alter their very relations, when she became the mother and he the child to be tended—was greater than any she was ever likely to know; and consequently had come to look upon her own marriage more as a possible means of lifting some of his burden from her father's shoulders, than as a source of satisfaction to herself.

Neither was she blind to the growing friendship of Israel Levison, whom she candidly confessed to herself she liked in a sincere, if Platonic, manner. Indeed, when she came to analyze the pros and cons, she came to the

conclusion that the man's name was the thing she liked least about him.

He certainly looked very presentable as he now came to meet her.

"The Gods are kind," was his greeting.

"I doubt whether you'll say so when you've carried these books," she returned, handing him the bundle.

"If you are in no great hurry," said Israel. "May we go back by Curtin's farm? I promised to give him some work. Poor devil's down on his luck," he added.

"It must be awfully pleasant," mused the girl, "to go through life playing fairy-godfather to one's distressed neighbors, as you do."

The Jew didn't contradict this assertion.

"It's a jolly sight more difficult than you might think," he said. "I find it much easier to 'blush to find it fame' than to 'do good by stealth.' You'd hardly believe how touchy some people are."

"Can you blame them?" asked Barbara. "Would you yourself like to eat the bitter bread of Charity?"

"Charity doesn't enter into the thing at all," he answered. "It's simply a question with me, that when I **MUST** put out large sums of money (he rather rolled this on his tongue) it

is so seldom that one's friends will allow it to be done in a manner advantageous to themselves."

"Well," said Barbara smiling. "I shouldn't have supposed that would have presented any great difficulty. Personally I don't think I should view it in that light."

"Don't you?" said the Jew quickly. "Let's test that view. I will put a hypothetical case before you, and you yourself shall be the judge."

"The Court is ready to listen to the argument," said Barbara.

"I have a great friend, whom we will call 'A,' a friend for whom I have a great respect, whom I would gladly help, yet hate to hurt. 'A' has a mortgage falling due in about three weeks' time, and, although he has made every effort it is possible to make, he can't raise the money. 'B,' the mortgagee, won't renew."

"Why won't 'B' renew?" interrupted the girl, who saw that Levison was but thinly veiling their own situation.

As Mr. Levison himself was "B," he should have had no difficulty in answering the question.

"I have not been able to find that out," said the Jew. "I only know it to be a certain fact.

Indeed, by a strange coincidence, I happen to be aware that instructions as to foreclosure have actually been issued in anticipation of the non-payment of the money. Now here am I, only too willing to help 'A' out of this trouble, and I haven't an idea how to set about it. What do you advise, O, Learned Judge?"

"I shan't attempt to misunderstand you, Mr. Levison," said Barbara; "you are alluding to Father and the Torrington Mortgage?"

"I am," said Levison, "and again I say: What do you advise?"

They had opened the gate of Farmer Curtin's twenty-acre meadow and, so engrossed had they been in their argument, they had not noticed the bit of red bunting hung on a stick by the side of the gate, a device always adopted by the farmer when his prize Holstein bull was loose in the pasture.

"Have you spoken to Father?"

"No, Lady Barbara, and, to be quite frank with you, I funk it."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Honestly, dear girl, I don't know," said the Jew, purposely slurring over the term of endearment in the hope that it would pass without comment. "I only know that you and yours are certain to have to face horrible worry

in the near future—worry which I am only too able and willing to prevent. I think that all I really wanted was that you should know that fact before it was too late.” He passed his hand over his forehead, and added wearily: “I seem fated to be ‘too late’ for so many good things in life.”

“How?”

“I was ‘too late’ to get any pleasure out of the youth that you, for instance, have enjoyed. The life of a galley slave grinding out money, made me ‘too late’ to make any real friends. And now, although in point of years I’m not yet forty, it sickens me to think that I’m ‘too late’ for the greatest happiness of all.” The girl glanced at him and was completely deceived by the worn look he assumed so naturally.

“Really, you’re mistaken, Mr. Levison,” she said. “Whatever else you have missed, everything is open to you now.”

Barbara meant this ambiguous statement in a perfectly general way, but Levison quickly seized upon the phrase.

“You mean that? You really mean that? That **EVERYTHING** is still open to me, Barbara? . . .”

But although Mr. Levison thoroughly intended to “propose,” Farmer Curtin’s prize

Holstein bull, "Highland Chief," took it into his head to usurp the prerogative of the Deity and do the other thing. He now made his stormy way towards them, with the evident intention of personally conducting them off the premises in the shortest possible order.

Calling out to him to "run for the trees," Barbara, followed by her would-be lover, made for two stunted oaks standing all by themselves in the very center of the meadow. Shouting that she would take the left tree and that he was to take the right, they only just managed to scramble into the branches in time. It was the nearest possible shave, but they did it.

"Highland Chief," probably feeling that he couldn't possibly be monarch of all he surveyed while these two rivals remained in his domain, stamped his feet and tore and shook the ground as if to shake these human acorns off his oak trees.

After the first shock, however, they soon realized their perfect safety . . . provided they stayed where they were.

But therein lay the trouble. It wasn't going to be any too easy to stay where they were for any length of time.

If there was going to be any "staying" competition at all, the sporting press would

undoubtedly have described it as "Highland Chief" first, and the rest nowhere.

In very early life, the staying in a tree for an almost indefinite period does not as a rule present insurmountable difficulties, but what one gains in years is often lost in other directions, and staying in trees is one of these things. Mr. Levison was now obtaining thorough, but painful, proof that old Dame Nature, having decided in her wisdom that crows shall be debarred the use of spring mattresses to rest on, is equally determined that human beings (after thirty years of age at any rate) shall find no crumb of comfort by roosting on boughs.

Barbara, in addition to being much nearer the age when such things are possible, had all the best of it in the matter of perches, her tree providing far more comfortable quarters from which to view the manoeuvres of infuriated cattle than that selected by her companion.

To add to this gentleman's discomfort, the knowledge was slowly but surely being borne in on him, that the quietly dignified exterior with which he usually impressed the world and his present position of precariously hanging on to an oak tree, were as oil is to water, and would not mix.

Aggravate this by the fact that the exhibition which you are involuntarily giving is taking place in full view of the one member of the opposite sex whom you are anxious to impress and, further, that your own sense of humor entirely fails to gibe with hers, and you will get some slight insight into Mr. Israel Levi-son's feelings.

One hour . . . two hours . . . and the approach of dark brought even to Barbara a most unpleasant shiver, while as for the pathetic figure opposite, he was giving his exclusive attention to the process of "hang-ing-on."

The only member of the trio who got any real enjoyment out of the situation was the bull. Having exhausted the pastime of digging their graves before their very eyes, and assuring himself once more that he couldn't touch even so much as the toe of either of them, he now devised the game of "cat and mouse." This consisted in solemnly marching away from his prisoners in a nonchalant and apathetic manner, even stooping to make pretence of nibbling a blade of grass here and there, and then suddenly wheeling round, letting forth the concentrated fury within him in his very best bellow, and charging between the two

trees like a battleship under a full head of steam.

It was this over-anxiety for artistic detail that finally led to his undoing. Had he been content with simply an acting, and not added thereto a speaking, part, he might have prolonged an amusement that would have increased with every passing hour. Unfortunately for him, his last terrific roar—caused by an agonized movement on the part of Mr. Levison—attracted the attention of a passing horseman in the adjoining lane.

CHAPTER IX

EXIT VILLAIN—UP CENTER

Angel-Face had now become a permanent member of the Torrington establishment; a tentative suggestion on his part that it was time for him to hit the trail again having been negated in the most emphatic manner.

He had then sought out the Marquis and made a proposition to him. This was nothing more than a suggestion that he, Julius P. Bowles, should be allowed to apprentice himself to old James Blenkinsopp, the family agent, with a view to learning the secret of the management of a large Estate, and generally qualifying himself to take some similar position at some future time, should he desire to do so.

He pointed out with commendable clearness that, on family grounds, at any rate, he "hadn't any strings on him," that the life was one that a man could live without losing his self-respect, and he now asked permission to interview Mr. Blenkinsopp, pay him such premium as he

might ask, and duly become installed as his pupil.

The Marquis did his level best to persuade the lad to return to School and complete his education, even if he did not see the necessity of afterwards proceeding to either 'Varsity. But here he found a rock that all his powers of logic could not budge.

"All you say, sir," commented the lad, "is the genuine dyed-in-the-wool goods for Devils and any boy brought up like him; but I'm a calf that carries quite another brand and wouldn't make no beef in that pasture. Book learning ain't my star play and never will be. Figuring will sure count some, and at that, as Devils can say, I'm no slouch. I'd sure love to get to work on this ranch of yours, but if you won't have me, why then I must try somewhere else."

"My dear lad," said the Marquis. "It's not a case of not wanting to have you; quite the contrary. It is with the earnest desire to guide you on a matter upon which I feel you are not able to judge for yourself, and to save the hostile comment you might justifiably make in after life."

"Well, sir, you may not think it now, but I do assure you that I know the trail I've just

got to travel; the only question is: will you let me hit it from your ranch, or send me round some other ways?"

So the Marquis gave in (as the Wise Magician had done before him) and made the desired arrangement with Mr. Blenkinsopp; stipulating only that there should be no question of Angel paying any premium, but on the contrary, that he should accept the sum of ten shillings a week as pocket-money, thereby stimulating the lad's burning desire to justify his inclusion on the "pay-roll" of the ranch.

He had taken up his residence at Mr. Blenkinsopp's batchelor cottage, much to that gentleman's satisfaction, and set to work to earn his salary with an energy that necessitated all his employer's ingenuity to satisfy.

The battle-cry of the infuriated "Highland Chief" roused him from his meditations for the frustration of Mr. Levison's projects (which constituted the real object of his desire to remain at Torrington) and he quickly sprinted to the pasture to discover the meaning thereof.

One glance at the two trees in the centre of the meadow soon provided a key to the situation, and he fairly hugged himself with joy at the prospect of once more engaging, if only for a few moments, in the fascinating occupa-

tion of cow-punching. Hastily uncoiling his rope and slipping it ready for business, he rejoiced to find a real opportunity of testing his pony in action. For sheer love of the game, Angel had trained "Pinto" (he wasn't a pinto really, but Angel called him so for old association's sake) to perform all the evolutions of a regular stock pony, and had no fear that the latter would be anything but a credit to the education.

Uttering a yell worthy of a Comanche warrior, which had the effect of startling the occupants of the oak tree almost as much as it irritated the bull, Angel circled round the latter until he got him into the desired position. Then the interested spectators witnessed an exhibition such as they had only associated with the name of the late lamented Buffalo Bill.

Angel was not going to finish off the game before he had got some fun out of it, and proceeded to lead the astonished bull the dance of his life. On finding that Pinto did absolutely anything he was asked to do, twisting, turning, and standing at just the right second, and seeming to be as pleased with the entertainment as his master, Angel played trick after trick upon the mystified and indignant "Highland Chief,"

finally roping, throwing and hobbling him when the excitement began to pall.

"Any casualties?" he called, arriving at the tree just in time to help Barbara out of it.

"Thanks to you, fair Knight, I think we're both intact," said she.

As if to throw the lie back in her very teeth, a ripping, rending sound of rapidly separating cloth was heard from the opposite tree. For while the late occupant thereof was more than anxious to once more establish a connection with Mother Earth, a certain portion of that gentleman's immaculate tweed breeches evidently entertained a contrary desire. With the result that while he, Israel Levison, made a perilous, but more or less successful, descent, the aforesaid portion of his clothes, rudely separated from the garments of which it formed so material a part, remained upon the tree.

This exasperating action on the part of his attire, temporarily destroyed Mr. Levison's *savoir faire*, and upon the spur of the moment he did a very foolish thing—he sat down. Unfortunately that was not the only spur he sat upon, but he rashly included the many hundreds of other spurs that go to comprise a very healthy bunch of thistles.

Not seeming satisfied with this position, he

hastily, and it is feared profanely, rose once more to his feet and backed against his late residence.

To regard this extraordinary evolution calmly was entirely beyond either Barbara or Angel-Face, who both collapsed in convulsive merriment and hung upon the patient Pinto for support. Now, it is an axiom that the humor of any situation depends largely upon the position from which you view it, and Mr. Levison, unwisely, overlooked that fact. His really vulnerable point—his vanity—had been punctured like unto the martyred St. Sebastian. If you subtract the impossibility of a man taking these embarrassing events humorously, you will readily agree that he is apt to become, quite unwillingly, a very foolish object indeed. Such was the Jew's position. The ferment of infuriated vanity which seethed within him precluded for the moment the use of his powers of speech, which, considering all things, was probably just as well.

Angel-Face, having no sort of sympathy with the writhings of the victim, happily assumed the duties of Assistant Tormentor.

"Dear . . . dear . . . dear . . . What WILL Mother say?" said the boy sorrowfully.

Had Barbara been able to see the joyous

light of battle that lit up Angel's eye, her conduct might have been different; but her own eyes were already so full of tears that everything seemed in a blur, and what with the strain and the subsequent laughter, she felt too weak to do anything at all but hang on to the pony's saddle.

"Guess we'll have to summon the breakdown gang, stranger. You surely got to go into the repair-shop."

"Get me out of this, you young fool," hissed the Jew.

"Sure Mike," said Angel. "The question is: How? Can you manoeuvre under your own steam, I wonder?"

"Take her away," was the next furious demand.

"Her?" sighed Angel-Face innocently. "Oh! you mean Lady Barbara? Sure we'll take her away; you don't want to camp here all night, do you?"

A shudder ran through Mr. Levison.

"Guess if I yanked that there blanket out of the tree, we could jamb it on again with pins. That's the password: PINS."

"Stop it, damn you," said the victim.

"Oh, my!" said the shocked Angel-Face. "Gent don't like pins? Won't have pins not

nohow. Well, if it ain't pins, what is it? 'Fraid I didn't bring along my tailoring outfit. Gee! I say, Barbara, got your work-bag?"

"Listen to me," said the Jew, now deadly serious. "If you don't stop this fooling . . . I'll . . . I'll . . ."

"Don't let me interrupt," said Angel politely.

"Come, Angel," said Barbara, roused to herself by the ghastly look on Israel Levison's handsome face. "I can make my way home . . . you and Mr. Levison follow."

But that did not suit Angel's book at all.

"Not on your life," said he. "That rope's none too firm and our young friend might get fresh again." A furious struggle from Highland Chief seemed to confirm this statement. "No, you ain't going home alone, that's a cinch . . . I got it . . . If you'll contemplate the scenery for a minute, the wounded can climb aboard Pinto. My stock saddle will make him look quite respectable again."

Although Mr. Levison saw the practical value of this suggestion, the fury that consumed him almost prevented him from carrying it out; however, he did eventually adopt it, and sat Angel's pony with such dignity as a man may who is riding a horse minus a large portion of garment that is not usually absent.

With the exception of a cheery remark from Angel to know whether his victim was comfortable, they made their way out of the field in silence.

On reaching the road, the boy, as he turned back from closing the gate, saw Mr. Levison, throwing dignity and discretion and all else beside to the four winds of Heaven, drive his heels into Pinto's sides and gallop out of sight as fast as the pony could carry him.

It is supposed that on the principle of "what is one amongst so many?" the Jew did not care what he looked like while beating his strategic retirement. But the spectacle caused Angel-Face to gurgie: "Excuse me" and subside into the hedge.

As they walked home, Barbara had time to realize the full significance of what had happened, and shrewdly suspected that Mr. Levison's lack of humor would not permit of him immediately renewing the conversation so abruptly broken off by Farmer Curtin's prize Holstein. Angel was not slow to note the change in his companion's manner.

"Anything wrong, Babs?"

"Yes, laddie. I'm afraid there is," said Barbara. "Same old worry . . . Money."

"Is my partner up against it again?"

It was a joke with them all to look upon Angel and the Marquis as “partners.”

“Terribly up against it. This time I hardly see how we CAN escape. There did seem to be just the ghost of a glimmer of a chance, but now . . . Oh well . . . the crash has GOT to come sooner or later, I suppose, so we try to keep a stiff upper lip and face it together.”

“Did the ‘ghostly glimmer’ beat it over the top of the hill about five minutes ago?”

“Yes, Angel, it did,” said Barbara sadly.

“Wal . . . do YOU know,” drawled Angel. “I got a notion that kind of a ghost is a pretty good spook to keep out of the family.”

“Who said anything about him being in the family?” said Barbara quickly.

“Nobody, lady, nobody. I said he was a good one to keep OUT.”

“Oh!”

“And further, nevertheless, whereas and moreover—I been reading a lot of legal dope lately—a mortgage and a foreclosure is just as liable to fail to connect as a cup and a lip.”

“You’re a dear cheerful old thing,” said Babs affectionately, “but you don’t know what a hole Dad’s in.”

“I’m rapidly acquiring that knowledge,” said Angel-Face. “Uncle and me’s been busy

sorting mortgages and liens for a week past; we filed away enough plasters to stock a drug-store."

"Uncle? . . . Who in the world is Uncle?"

"James Horace Lysander Blenkinsopp. Now I couldn't call him Horace or Lysander and Jimmy didn't seem respectful, so we fixed on 'Uncle' . . . I got to call him something, ain't I?"

"Certainly; but why not Mr. Blenkinsopp?"

"Wall, I did try that at the start, but then I put it straight up to him, that if we was to have to work together, and bunk in the same shack, the 'Mister' was likely to break under the strain, so we cut afresh, had a new deal, and 'Uncle' was the result."

"He's an old dear," said Babs.

"Second the motion," said Angel.

"But HE can't do anything to help us," went on the girl. "Why, it's only due to his wonderful management of the Estate that we've staggered along as we have. Now he's at the end of his tether."

"Not by a damned sight . . . I beg your pardon, Babs, but when I gets excited and don't think, my early training just nacherly breaks loose . . . What I want to say is, that the old gentleman's been doing some pretty

tall thinking just lately, and he's given birth to a scheme what ought to help some—him and me's been working at it like Beelzebub."

"Oh, Angel . . . Angel," said the girl, almost breaking down. "If you can only think of anything to help, we'll all love you for ever and ever. Amen."

"That suits me fine," said Angel-Face.

CHAPTER X

THE BIRTH OF THE "PARTNERSHIP TRUST"

"Now, Uncle," said Angel-Face, as he and Mr. Blenkinsopp sat at breakfast next morning. "Looks to me as if '*The time has come,*' *the Walrus said*, for you and me to jump right in and start something."

"My dear lad," said the old man sorrowfully. "I'm bitterly afraid that a bankruptcy—or at least an assignation—can no longer be avoided. It's been a hopeless task these many years, Julius. Father and son, we Blenkinsopps have struggled and strived to help the House we love; and year by year the mortgages increase, while the income drops, until now, for the first time since I took charge, nearly forty years ago, I despair of being able to hold things together."

"Keep her going, Uncle," said Angel cheerily. "As the Indians say, 'The sun's not dead because you can't see him.'"

"True, laddie, true. I've said that to myself many a hundred times; Julius, I wouldn't have you think me what you would call 'a

quitter.' Had I been that, we shouldn't be here now: neither would our friends be living at Torrington Towers; but nobody, not even Lord Devereaux himself, knows the situation as I do, and it is just that knowledge that makes me say to you now, that the beginning of the end will take place on the 21st of this present month."

The old man raised his head and smiled sadly across at the cheery little figure opposite.

"It is doubly bitter to me, boy, now that your bright youth has come to light up this old house of mine. I'm going to feel it quite a lot when the time comes for you and me to travel our separate roads."

"Same here, Uncle. I ain't never had no home till now, and it's surely hit me just where I live . . . Say . . . what's the matter with you and me sticking along together for keeps?"

"The same reason that plays havoc with so many fine castles in the air, laddie . . . Money . . . I have none . . . I never did save a great deal, and that little has long since gone to eke out some overdue payment of interest for the Estate; but I wouldn't have the Marquis know that," he added hastily.

"Righto, Don Quixote," laughed Angel.

"Your deadly secret's safe with me. Now, can you stand a shock, d'you think?"

"Eh?" queried the old man.

"I asked you if you reckoned you could stand a shock," said Angel. "A hy-u, heap good, number One sized shock?"

"I've every confidence of resisting so unusual an occurrence," said old Mr. Blenkinsopp.

"Then haste thee and prepare thyself. The gift of tongues is mine this day and I would speak with thee of mighty things. The Night is passed. The Dawn is here. In the language of the paleface: Thy woes have went."

"There is much comfort in thy speech, brother," said the old man, matching Angel's metaphor. "But speech is but a meagre food in this unfruitful land. The deer have gone. The Buffalo is dead. The Day of Miracles is passed."

"Not so, prithee, forsooth, and peradventure," said Angel, picking up the old-fashioned square bowler hat that belonged to Mr. Blenkinsopp. "Ladies and gentlemen," he continued. "Our next trick will be to produce a Miracle from an empty hat. Will some kind lady or gentleman lend me an ordinary human being . . . any human being will answer the purpose, and the more ordinary

the better. Thank YOU, sir." He changed sides to indicate that he was the "Human being" referred to. "Now watch me very closely, not forgetting that the quickness of the hand deceives the eye, and that it is ALL done by kindness. There is NO deception. Presto."

Here he clapped Mr. Blenkinsopp's hat on his head—to be more accurate, "over" his head, for it slid right down to his chin.

"Truly my brother makes a great medicine," said the old man. "His magic is as deep as the Lakes, but WHERE is the Miracle he promised?"

Angel stepped to the middle of the room, disentangled the hat, and bowed.

"Right here, Uncle, and ready for business. Allow me to introduce to you Julius P. Bowles, Miracle."

"You're right, laddie," almost whispered the old man. "It IS a miracle . . . this glorious youth of yours."

"Fortunately, Uncle, this Miracle possesses more than youth. It's none of your trashy German-made goods, but the gen—u—ine article. We will now inspect the ghastly secrets of the charnel house. Open Sesame! Behold Aladdin's Cave! A Cave of which we two

alone possess the key. A cave from whence at dead of night we'll haul our sacks of gold and jewels rare. I am, to put it shortly, sir, a multi-millionaire."

"I wish you were, dear lad."

"Uncle," said Angel seriously, coming round and sitting on the arm of the chair. "The show's over. On my word of honor, I'M an honest-to-goodness millionaire. Pounds too, not Dollars."

"God bless my soul," murmured the old man.

"Now, don't forget," said the boy softly, "you promised to stand the shock. Everything is all plain sailing from now on. You and me's got to go into Executive Session right away, and stay at it till we settle our plan of campaign."

It was far too delicate a business to hurry over, and it took the two conspirators three days' hard work before they saw their way clearly, step by step.

"Aye, laddie, it's a wonderful thing that's happened to us all," said the old man when they had finished. "The hand of Providence, no less. And I can justify the step you're taking, that's the glory of it. 'Tis only the want of Capital (which we have never had) that keeps us from paying all our charges. We'll

have your Mr. Weatherley to look at everything on your behalf, and I'll guarantee to say he'll advise you that you couldn't make a better investment."

"That's the ticket, Uncle," said Angel-Face. "We'll do as you say. Then, we'll operate as a Trust Company, so no one won't know who we are. I know," he cried, "we'll call it 'The Partnership Trust'! That's the Marquis and me. Sounds good and ain't no lie. Gee, Uncle, there's going to be some good times coming!"

CHAPTER XI

YEAST

Angel sat at his office desk adding up long columns of musty figures, exercising a stoical indifference to the glorious weather outside, and refusing to wonder what mischief Kit was up to. Lucky kid! "One hundred and thirty-three . . . and five's eight . . . and nine's forty-seven . . . and . . . Blank! A well-directed missile, which upon investigation turned out to be a crumpled Tam-o'-shanter rolled up into a tight ball, took him squarely on the nose and brought his mathematical calculations to a sudden end.

A glance along the line of fire disclosed Kit, lodged in the center of an apple tree, in which she had ensconced herself, the better to bombard her friend the enemy.

"Buck up, old thing," she cried. "Chuck the stuffy old books and come and play. I've awful important news for you. Oh! . . . and I say, don't forget my cap."

Angel, looking calmly down at that piquant little face, surrounded by its halo of glorious

red hair, and hanging on to the apple branches in what seemed to be a desperately precarious position, little dreamt that he was doing so for the last time.

Many a time and oft was he to see her again. Countless times was he to look at her—but never “calmly.”

She was waiting for him at the door when Angel got there, and calling out: “Beat you to the bridge,” started sprinting down the path. The boy shot after her just as soon as he could get off the mark, and did his level best to reduce the gap between them. Gauging the distance as he ran, he doubted very much whether he could make good the handicap. Kit did not run after the accepted manner of her sex, with that strange sidelong shuffle usually adopted by her sisters. Though even this skirt-endangered mode of progression is capable of covering the ground in pretty quick time when the runner is sufficiently young, it cannot compete with the direct action favored by the male, of bringing the knees as near the chin as possible, and running on the ball of the foot. It was in this latter manner that Kit was now speeding for the winning-post as represented by the bridge, slightly hampered, it is true, by the presence of a skirt, even though that conven-

tional garment was, in her case, always brought to the irreducible minimum.

It was only this slight handicap that enabled Angel to close up at all, and it now began to tell. Just as he put all he knew in a final effort to catch her, Kit's foot turned on a loose pebble and she dived forward head over heels like a shot rabbit.

"Damaged, kiddie?" cried Angel.

"N-no, I don't t-think so," said Kit, lightly running her hands over spheres of probable trouble. "Oh . . . Wow! . . . that's unpleasant!"

On examination, they discovered she had a nasty cut on her knee.

"Got to wash that right away, kid," said Angel. "Too much dirt in that cut. D'you think you can make it down to the brook?"

"I can have a shot anyway. Oh, what rot . . . the beastly thing's gone out of business."

Slipping his arm round the girl, Angel called: "Hang on" and carried her down to the water. There they bathed the wound until all the dirt and most of the pain had gone out of it.

"Thank you, Doctor . . . That's much better," said Kit. "Let us rest awhile and jaw . . . I've oceans of news."

"Unburden thyself."

"First and foremost, Im to be 'finished'."

"Well, I must say," said Angel, "I shouldn't have chosen a gravel path to start with."

"Ass . . . Idiot . . . and product of three generations of mules . . . It's my EDUCATION that's to be 'finished'."

"Didn't know as you'd got any."

A handful of grass down the back of his neck rewarded this effort.

"To attain this desirable and all important end," continued the girl, "I am to proceed forthwith to Paris, there to become the vassal of certain old dears—Barbara says they ARE "old dears" —who are guaranteed to turn me out a 'perfect lady'."

"Oh, the Devil," said Angel. "Going away? . . . What about ME? How the Sam Hill am I going to get on if you beat it? Babs is all O.K., of course, but she's too high up the ladder for me . . . and even Devils, who only blows in every so long, is getting out of my class now that he's all fed up with Oxford. But YOU, you red-headed, long-legged, tenas klutchman . . . why, you're just right."

"If my knee didn't hurt so much, I'd roll you down the hill for calling me names, you,

very Canadian, very impertinent, pretty little boy."

Kit knew all the weak points in Angel's armor, and any allusion to his personal beauty never failed her at a pinch, when telling repartee was imperatively necessary.

"If your knee didn't hurt so much," drawled the furious lad, "I'd surely like to mix it up with you. 'Tisn't cricket to punch a man like that, just because you're under the protection of the Red Cross."

"All right, sweetheart, don't get ratty." The "sweetheart" was another dig that always got home effectively. "Honestly, Angel, I'm dying to get out and see something more of the jolly old world, and if you are really fond of me, as you say you are . . ."

"Never said any such rot," retorted the indignant boy.

"Well, Mr. Particular, if you are as fond of me as you **DON'T** say you are, you'd be just as pleased as I am, and wish me luck."

"Sure I'll wish you luck," said Angel. "But I'll be scalped twice over before I say I'm pleased."

"Being a boy, I suppose that's the best you can do."

Kit sighed with satisfaction. She had got

in a lot of deadly work that day. Any assumption of feminine superiority invariably got on Angel's nerves, so Kit was in that beatific state peculiar to her sex, when the one male creature in the world whom they look upon as their own special perquisite is writhing in helpless subjugation. She joyfully strewed grass-seeds on his unconscious head and proceeded:

"There is yet more to come . . . Jack Carruthers is home again."

"Not having the pleasure of the gentleman's acquaintance," began Angel.

"Oh, I keep forgetting you haven't been with us since the beginning of time. Jack Carruthers has a place—it's a big farm really—about nine miles away. His father died in debt and left Jack with a big mortgage on the farm. He let it to pay the interest and went to Africa. There he made a little money, not much, but enough to pay off the mortgage, and he has come home to make a living out of the farm. He's one of the **VERY** best," concluded Kit with fervor.

"Oh, IS he? . . . What's the beggar's age?"

"About twenty-seven or twenty-eight, I should say . . . Quite old, anyway."

"All right, let the gentleman live," said Angel.

"Now it came to pass," went on Kit, "that from the time my beloved sister could toddle on her own two feet—and even earlier, if family historians are to be believed—until the time of Jack's departure for Afric's sunny fountains, he and she had always been most particular pals. Of course," she added, "he doesn't know yet whether he can make a living out of the farm, still, I'm inclined to think we'll yet see some fun."

"What? In watching the poor devil starve on his ranch?"

"No, blockhead! In watching him tumble head over heels in love with Babs and being scared stiff to tell her so."

"Rot," said Angel with scorn. "He's a full grown man, ain't 'e? What's he got to be scared about?"

"May we therefore assume," mimicked Kit, "that Julius P. Bowles, that is, if he's ever 'fully grown,' will feel no tremble when conversing with the lady of his heart?"

"Wall," said Angel, slowly punctuating his remark by throwing pebbles in the brook, "If ever (plunk) I go plumb batty (plunk) over any one female woman (plunk), you can call me all the names you (plunk) please."

Kit made a very unladylike face at the boy's

back, then, giving a little happy laugh, blew a silent kiss towards him.

“I thank thee for that word, Ju,” said she.
“I’ll not forget it.”

And she kept her word.

CHAPTER XII

LITERA SCRIPTA MANET

“The Cottage.

“*Dear Kit,*

“The pistol’s gone and they’re off all right, just as you figured they would be. Jack Caruthers, who in other respects is a first-class and perfectly sensible citizen, has gone clean bug-house over Babs—just as you said. Him and me lope along together quite comfortable, so, of course, he takes liberties, and although I ain’t done him no harm at all, I got to lie down sometimes under a snowslide of the most appalling rot you ever heard. Gee! but he’s a holy terror when he gets started. Just as you said. He’s like a kid of six wot’s stole the jam, when he gets within half a mile of Barbara. That reminds me: How the Sam Hill did you **KNOW** he’d act that way? Did he tell you?

“Of course I done my best for him and told him what I would do if ever I wanted to crowd my wigwam, but, bless you, d’you think he takes a mite of notice? No, sir. Just smiles (I feel like batting him, he looks so foolish) and tells me to wait till my time comes.

"This monkey business was getting too strenuous for mine, so I set to work and figured how I could stop it. Got it all schemed out fine so as we'd settle the racket for keeps one way or the other. I told him that he needn't to worry any, that I'd take the pack on my own shoulders and get it clear of the tangle. Told him to leave it all to me, and I'd have a long pow-wow with Babs and get this thing straightened out. Pointed out it was giving me quite a chore runnin' around and negociatin' between 'em, but that I'd do it to get quit of the trouble. Well, sir . . . What do you think he did? He blew up. Blew up higher nor a kite. Talk? Gee! how that guy did talk. Couldn't catch on to half of it till he cooled off some. Then he made it clear—oh, **QUITE** clear—that if I let a squeak out of me to Babs, or put her wise that he was a lunatic and likely to stay one till she gave the high-sign, he'd take every last little bit of me to pieces, so they wouldn't never go together again. **THERE'S** gratitude for you!

"Say, Kiddie: I got something I want to tell you. It seems that **ALL** females, whether they like it or not, is liable to attacks from lunatics in Jack's class. Now **YOU'RE** a female—tain't your fault, but there it is—and

so you're in the danger zone. What I want to say is, if ever you find yourself up against it, call on ME. Don't you worry one mite, just call on ME. I'll fix him so he won't know a cook-stove from an elephant's hind leg.

"When are you coming back???"

"ANGEL."

"Torrington Towers.

"*Sister Mine,*

"I miss you more and more every month, but as it was all my doing that you were sent to Paris in the first instance, and as I know it's the very best thing that can happen to you, I suppose I ought not to grumble. But, oh Kit, you are missing the most comic thing that ever happened. However we, any of us, existed before Angel came to live here, I really can't think. He seems to have altered everything and everybody. He practically runs the Estate now, and dear old Blenky says that nobody could do it better. Certainly, between the two of them, they've somehow or other found some money and we all feel much easier.

"But that is not what I was going to tell you. To return: Dear old, inarticulate Jack is deeper in love than even I thought he could

be, and the deeper he gets, the more convinced he is that he must not 'ruin my young life' and all that foolishness, by asking me to be a farmer's wife, etc., etc., etc., ad lib. I suppose it will all end some fine day by my having to propose to him myself. I should certainly do it before I'd let him go—and even then I feel sure he'd struggle to prevent my 'sacrificing myself.' You know how stubborn these dear, horribly honest creatures can be. Well, the everlastingly funny part of it all is that the blessed Angel can't understand it one little bit! as he so poetically puts it, 'it's got him plumb buffaloed.' He states quite openly that if we would only leave it all to **HIM**, the whole thing could be fixed up in five minutes. Can't you see him? Opening those glorious eyes of his wider and wider, as he gets more excited, and laying down the law like a blessed infant? I'm in no hurry and I'll try and keep it going for the six months till you get home again, then we can enjoy the fun together. **WHATEVER** you do, don't say **ANYTHING** to Angel that's likely to make him curl up.

"I've only seen Mr. Levison once since the 'acorn' incident, when our little Western warrior rescued us both from Highland Chief, and

then he was, Oh, so formal—not a bit like he used to be. Rather more handsome, if anything, in his slightly foreign style, and, of course, perfectly dressed, as per usual. I understand that he and Dad have been meeting quite often in London lately, and it may be that our financial relief has come from that quarter. I do hope it isn't so. It seems horribly childish of me to say it, but I'm terrified of that man, Kit. Of course, I've no real grounds for this, but you know that when we women feel really certain of anything, we're pretty generally right—grounds or no grounds. Heigho, I don't want to meet trouble half way, so that we must just 'bide events' and pray that I'm wrong.

"Now that you are in the very center of the Universe, DO write and tell me what everybody is wearing?

"Thine,
"BABS."

"Torrington Towers.

"My own little Daughter,

"I loved your birthday letter, dear. It almost compensated for the absence of my baby girl. 'Baby,' alas, no longer, for if the photograph you sent me is at all true to life, I

prophecy that my very grown up 'baby' is about to agitate many of my unfortunate sex when she emerges from her lair, dressed in her war-paint and ready for battle.

"Yes, darling, thank God, the awful load that has haunted your poor old Dad for so many years is being miraculously lifted. The part of Fairy Godmother seems to be played by a private Corporation known as 'The Partnership Trust' who have steadily taken up my mortgages as they fall due.

"It almost looks as if an extraordinary care had been taken to veil the identity of my real benefactors, but I have a suspicion—amounting almost to a certainty—that my very good friend Levison is at the back of it all. Indeed, when I tackled him with it point blank, he didn't deny it, although, it is true, he insisted that I should remember that he didn't admit it. But that, of course, is tantamount to the same thing. Naturally I don't like this secrecy, but I'm not in a position to demand explanations, and am only too thankful to let them work in their own way. The Estate too, is producing marvels under the dynamic energy of Julius ('my partner,' as he calls himself) and really, Kit, young as he is in years, and hopelessly ignorant of many things that you knew in your

nursery, he's a wonderful man of business, and (so Blenkinsopp tells me) the best judge of stock in the county. That boy has wound his strange personality round the hearts of all of us, and I only hope the 'wanderlust' that's in his blood does not claim him for its own, and so deprive us of a sunbeam that I, for one, should sadly miss.

"Everybody is looking forward to your home-coming, dear girl, and no one more so than

"Your loving old
"FATHER."

"Chamford House.

"*Dear Kit,*

"For the sake of old times, and, in some small payment, for the numberless scrapes I've pulled you out of, do something to help me now, for I'm nothing less than desperate. All my future life and hopes of happiness lie in your being able to come to my rescue.

"The peril that threatens me every moment of the day is called Bowles—Julius P. Bowles—and is one of the deadliest kind known to Science. Call him off, and tell him to leave me and my affairs alone, there's a good girl.

"I'm sending this S.O.S. to you, because

when I poured out my troubles to that old brick, Blenkinsopp, he merely smiled serenely over his spectacles and said: 'Write to Kit.'

"I haven't the faintest idea why. Have you?"

"Yours in torment,

"JACK CARRUTHERS."

CHAPTER XIII

A FALLING GLASS

"Now isn't that just like Kit?" said Barbara, some six months later. "She writes six whole pages of hieroglyphics to tell us that she'll arrive tomorrow, and not a single word as to what train she's coming by. How on earth do we know when to meet her?"

"We don't," said Devils. "And as old Jim's one-horse shay has fallen to bits at last, she'll jolly well have to walk from the station. Do the little beggar good. Teach her to be more careful."

He and Angel had just finished a gruelling singles and were enjoying a hard-earned cup of tea on the tennis lawn.

"Really it's most annoying," continued Babs. "I wanted to meet her with the governess cart, so that I could have her all to myself and get in all the news before any of you people."

"'The best-laid schemes o' Mice an' Men gang aft a-gley,'" mused Devils.

"But as I'm neither a man nor a mouse, that needn't apply to me," returned his sister.

"I do wonder why Kit can never act like any other normal person."

"Ain't built that way, thank goodness," said Angel.

A tennis ball in the back of the neck was his reward.

"Rude little boy," said Babs. "Talking of boys—I wonder whether Kit will see the GREAT change in you, Angel? Let's see, it's half an inch, isn't it? And you really have filled out quite a lot."

"Sounds like a balloon," said Devils. "But give him time, Rome wasn't built in a day, and he'll grow up if you only give him time."

"He's grown up enough to give you the fight of your life across that net," cried Angel. "Have at thee, thou saucy malapert."

And away they went at it hammer and tongs until it was time to dress for dinner.

Walking back to the Cottage that night, Angel chuckled to himself to think of a telegram that he'd carried about with him all day. It read as follows: "Meet me with runabout Mindon Junction 3.30 tomorrow. Not a word to anybody.—Kit."

Now, the prospect of being propelled over the countryside by the agency of a can of gasoline had, at first, filled Angel with a holy hor-

ror. This lasted until one fine day he came across Jevons (the Marquis' chauffeur) marooned in the midst of a sea of machinery. On hearing that this scrap heap of shining parts comprised the sum total of a motor-car's internal economy, he was soon lost in the fascinating pastime of assisting the said Jevons to put the puzzle together again.

He then went home and very thoroughly disintegrated Mr. Blenkinsopp's runabout; only to find that when he had reconstructed the whole machine, he possessed, in addition to a complete automobile:

1. Sufficient parts for an entire carburetter,
2. A thing like a knitting needle with a screw at the end,
3. Two piston rings,
4. A miscellaneous assortment of washers,
5. Twenty-three screws and nine ball-bearings.

To his utter astonishment, a call for help to the knowledgable Jevons found a use for all these things, and resulted in Angel getting bitten with a feverish desire to do similar conjuring tricks for himself.

Three quarters of an hour was always considered to be ample time in which to reach

Mindon Junction. But Angel wasn't taking any chances, deeming it much wiser to give the car all the rope she wanted for "bucking, boring and general devilment." He accordingly decided overnight to start immediately after lunch, and roll there at his ease. While dressing next morning, however, he altered this schedule and settled on getting away about twelve o'clock. By the time he had finished the third rasher of bacon he had reduced this down to 11 A.M. Breakfast scrambled over in record time, he couldn't find any reason for not starting right away—and he did.

As any experienced motorist could have told him (there being time enough in hand to build a new car if needful) he arrived at Mindon Junction in just exactly thirty-seven and a half minutes from the time of starting; there to find himself face to face with the problem of passing the time between 9.57 A.M. and 3.30 P.M. (provided the train was punctual) and a place composed entirely of one railway station and one particularly evil-smelling brickyard.

He whiled away the first hour by continuing his studies of "Internal Combustion Engines and their Uses," but, not daring to verify the statements made in this interesting handbook by practical experiment, lest a worse thing

befall him and he should not be able to return at will to the *status quo ante*, he came to the reluctant conclusion that his mind was not for the moment properly attuned to the investigation of motor-engineering. He was further confirmed in this opinion by discovering that, although he had studied no less than thirty-four pages of the manual, the only problem they dealt with was: "How much will red hair change in a period of three years?"

As the day dragged on and the sun grew hotter and hotter, the brickfield began to assert itself and would not be ignored. So, Angel took out the switch-key and turned off the gasoline to assure the safety of his steed, and beat away to windward until he got clear of that awful odor. The smell of that brickfield was destined to haunt Angel for the rest of his natural life, and he never went near one if he could help it.

Out in the open fields at last, he lay in the shade and mused. Sometimes his thoughts formed themselves into a kind of rule-of-three sum, *i.e.* "if a man in England grows three inches in three years, how much will a girl in Paris grow?" At others, they took on a semi-medical turn, as witness the following: "Given that symptoms of madness are developed in

one sister, what are the probabilities of its affecting the other?"

The grass was soft. The shade was cool. The sight of two beautiful green stars (Kit always said he was color-blind, but he still stuck to it they were green) having a wonderfully woven rope ladder leading right up to them, was too good an opportunity to be missed; proceeding therefore to the foot thereof, he wasn't at all surprised to find the ladder composed entirely of the most exquisite red hair. Gaily starting on his journey aloft and arriving about half way, somebody above him cut the ladder in two and he fell to earth amidst screams of demoniacal laughter. On analysis, this proved to be the whistle of a train shutting off steam preparatory to stopping at Mindon Junction.

Angel sprang to his feet and ran for all he was worth, never stopping until he rushed panting on to the platform from which the train had now departed. Yes—by Heck—there she was, standing with her back to him, pointing out her luggage to the lethargic porter. Taking his courage in both his hands, he ran quickly and silently forward, put his arm round her waist and waltzed down the platform with an entirely unknown and desperately indig-

nant middle-aged lady. This appalling apparition deprived Angel of his last remaining breath, and he sank upon a bench, gasping like a well run fish.

Luckily, the victim of his misplaced welcome was also too breathless for words, and she retired rapidly from so dangerous a locality. The beery voice of the ancient porter roused him from his nightmare.

"Ole Miss Critchetts, her don't dance like her used to forty year ago."

"W . . . where's the . . . the . . . other lady gone?" gasped Angel.

"Baint lookin' ter give no more dancin' lessons be yer?" laughed the old man. "No one by ther 1.27 but ole woman Critchetts."

"W . . . what did you say that train was?"

"Ther 1.27 . . . Lunnun Express."

"Suffering Sisters! Another two hours!" groaned Angel.

When that common, but highly annoying disease, known as "the fidgets" attacks a person of Angel's temperament, it is apt to go hardly with the patient, and the final arrival of the 3.30 found him very ill equipped for the shocks that were in store for him.

The fleeting glimpse, however, that he caught of Kit as she flashed by, and the little gloved

hand waving from the window of a first-class carriage, banished every vestige of the agony he had endured. He just reached the door in time to open it for her, bursting out with:

"By Jupiter, Kiddie, this is somethin' . . . Li" Here he tailed off hopelessly in unintelligible mumble, amazed with a great amazement by the radiant being who was even now shaking him by the hand and saying:

"Come along, I've only got a small dressing-case with me, so we haven't any luggage to worry about. Let's get into the car and have a good long talk."

But in this, she asked too much; for that was just the one thing that Angel was unable to give—talk. Once or twice he did make a valiant effort, but, finding that he could not open his mouth without laying bare the hopeless confusion that seethed within him, he soon took refuge in monosyllables. To his huge relief, Kit did not appear to notice anything wrong, but climbed aboard the car, chatting merrily.

Angel cranked away at the handle for some minutes without achieving any practical result, when it suddenly dawned on him that the insertion of the switch key might have the desired effect. This proved to be the case, and the

engine hummed away famously until Angel had climbed into the driver's seat, when, with a feeble sigh like the passing of an evening breeze, it gave up the ghost.

"Doesn't it beat all," cried Angel. "She came along here like she was the best thing on wheels; now she's startin' to lay her ears back."

"How long has she been standing?" asked Kit.

"Since about 10 o'clock," was the thoughtless reply.

"Ten o'clock! What on earth made you come at 10 o'clock?"

"Search me," said Angel, "so many things have happened since, I can't remember."

"Oh, did you have any adventures? DO tell me?"

"Not . . . for . . . all . . . the . . . gold in the Klondike," said the boy.

"I call it mean not to let me into the fun."

"It wasn't no FUN, believe me . . . No . . . This blamed place is hoodooed. That's what's the matter with it. Let's get out."

"But isn't that just what you're trying to do?" asked Kit.

As Angel was by this time nearly black in the face with useless cranking, there seemed some grounds for this remark.

"Gosh . . . if I wasn't so scared of not being able to put her up again, I'd bust her wide open," said the furious boy.

"It can't be anything serious, because she went so nicely just now," said Kit. "Are you sure there's plenty of gas?"

"Jumping Jerusalem," groaned Angel, "I never turned the tap on."

This simple remedy applied, he had no further difficulty in starting.

Angel had not yet got to that pitch of efficiency when the driver performs all the necessary motions unconsciously. He always had to think which of the many levers, pedals and other necessary accessories had to be adjusted, and in what order. Unfortunately "thinking" was not, for the moment, his long suit. However, the application of the low gear induced the car to shiver a good deal, and even make a sort of non-committal jolt in the desired direction, but beyond this—nothing. With a brain in the throes of wrestling with at least fifteen different causes of probable trouble, Angel heard a soft voice whisper in his ear:

"Don't you think, Angel dear, that if you released the brake, we might progress a little faster?"

The music of the voice and the affectionate

term it employed, caused the chauffeur to do several things all at once, including the releasing of the brake. The result was a whi-r-r-r of the engine and an insane desire on the part of the car to take them straight home without going through the formality of touching the road at all. An entirely new and untried combination permitted Angel to reduce the speed to a moderate twenty miles an hour, and so released his thoughts to revert to this other disturbing element, who was sitting so comfortably beside him.

"I'm afraid I'm not in Jevons' class . . . yet," began Angel.

"Oh, DON'T say that," said Kit. "I never remember Jevons doing anything half so exciting. Why, the way you took that hurdle by the bridge was simply magnificent . . . and as for Blackman's Corner, I'm CERTAIN Jevons never came round it on only two wheels."

"I hope I didn't scare you," said Angel anxiously. "I wouldn't scare you for a fortune."

"I'm not *easily* scared, Angel. *You* ought to know that."

"How?"

"By past experience."

"That ain't nothin' to go by."

"Why not?"

"Because I ain't never had no past experience."

"Angel??"

"Well," said the boy desperately, "I guess I'd better tell you just how I feel . . . I'll bust if I don't anyway . . . I feel like asking you to wait around here a minute while I run back and pick up my pal Kit what was to come by the 3.30 train. That's what I feel like, and now it's out I feel better some."

"But . . . Angel, DEAR??"

"James Christmas, watch out!" yelled Angel.

A swerve of the car took them shooting up the bank, thence they ran along the top for a few yards, finally dropping into the road again.

"I'm real sorry," said Angel seriously. "But if we two are to have a fighting chance of making port with all our parts intact, I got to ask you not to address me as 'dear' . . . I've nearly killed you twice . . . a third time's unlucky."

"But I've done it before," said Kit innocently.

"Not often," said Angel. "And when you did, you generally punched my head at the same time."

"I'll do it now, if you wish," was the cool response.

"Better not try any experiments," said the now cautious driver, "there's no knowing how this bronco will act under the treatment."

Following this advice, they chatted (or rather Kit did) on indifferent subjects until they arrived safely at the Hall. There, Angel left her for her family to wrestle over while he made his way back to his own quarters, feeling as if the bottom had fallen out of the whole blamed Universe.

"Gee!" he murmured savagely. "It's just like going to a potlatch and stopping for a funeral."

CHAPTER XIV

THE BREEZE FRESHENS

Had Angel only been able to see Kit some hours later, curled up like a squirrel in Barbara's big arm-chair, and giving her version of the afternoon's proceedings, it might have thrown a ray of light on his clouded outlook.

"My DEAR Babs," said that young lady. "If we handle this thing in a scientific manner, the possibilities of endless entertainment are simply unlimited. I had all my work cut out not to spoil the whole show by an exhibition of untimely merriment, but fortunately I hung on like grim death, and of course he never noticed it—he wasn't in a condition, poor dear, to notice anything," she added with a chuckle.

"Don't overdo it," said Barbara. "It's one thing to extract amusement out of my affairs and Jack's, where the personal element does not enter into it, and it's quite another to turn his blessed innocence to his own disadvantage."

"Disadvantage?" cried Kit. "Why, he's going to get a course of education that he couldn't obtain at any University in the world, and all free gratis and for nothing."

"That's just what I'm afraid of, dear," said her sister seriously. "It may not be for—nothing. You may not send in a bill for the tuition, but he may insist upon paying, in spite of you, and it may leave him a beggar at the end of it all."

"Never mind, sister mine," was the cheery reply. "I promise to 'kiss the place and make it well,' if the patient is 'in extremis' . . . Oh, Glory be . . . When he begged me not to call him 'dear,' because he might otherwise drive me into the ditch, I all but rolled there of my own accord."

Kit fairly hugged herself with joy.

"Did I tell you that Mr. Levison is back again?" said Babs.

"No?"

"He is, but our relations are nothing like what they used to be. Instead of begging us to run in and out whenever we felt like it, he now sends the most formal invitations, which I, as formally accept. I shouldn't have done that, only Dad asked me to, and his politeness can positively be 'felt.' And there's another thing that you ought to know, I verily believe that he'd slay Angel with all the pleasure in life."

"Oh, would he," said Kit viciously. "I don't

doubt that my little man can keep up his end in any sort of a square fight, but that's just what he might not get. Anyhow, it can't do any harm to keep an eye on the gentleman; I'll be extra sweet to him."

The object of these future attentions on Kit's part was at that moment expounding to her father the laws governing High Finance, and explaining in a manner that a layman could understand, that highly complicated subject, the history of International banking.

"Really, that's most interesting," said the Marquis. "I'd no idea that so dry a subject could contain so romantic a story. You must have studied this thing for years?"

"Indeed, yes. More years than I care to count. I'd gladly give half of all I possess if I could only discard a few of them."

"What nonsense, man," exclaimed his host. "You're in the very prime of life, with all the best of it in front of you."

"I've very little use for it now," said Levison bitterly. "Hitherto ambition has supplied the necessary incentive, without which there is no salt in life. But now that ambition has not only been satisfied, but satiated; now that the money and the power that I've fought and struggled for, are mine, what is there left?"

"Why, man. Everything," said the enthusiastic Irishman. "Shooting. Now, you are a first-class shot, and dead keen."

"I was."

"You ride as well as any man I know, and love hunting."

"I did."

"And as for golf, they tell me that you have few equals amongst the amateurs."

"I don't deny it."

"Well, Thunder and Thor! what else do you want? Not only are you able to excel at all these things—other poor devils can do that—but you've unlimited means to indulge in them. So, again I say, what else do you want?"

"A . . . Home."

"A very natural desire, and nothing to stop its fulfilment."

"Pardon me, my lord," said the Jew quietly. "There is everything to stop its fulfilment."

Lord Devereaux, being really interested in his subject, and having long since discarded the suspicion of Barbara being any attraction, had rattled on in his breezy way, in complete ignorance that the Jew was directing the conversation to his own ends.

"It is scarcely possible," Levison continued, "to found a home without that necessary adjunct, a wife."

"Well, the world's no smaller than it was in my young days, and it's still there; there are 'Fair ladies' in plenty, and I should not have supposed you to be burdened with the 'faint heart'."

"Your Lordship has gone to the root of the matter. I have NOT got the World to choose from. My world, unfortunately for me, is comprised of one woman, and one woman only. When a man of my years knows beyond all question of doubt that this is so, he has only a lifetime of misery to face when that one woman is out of his reach."

The stage lost a very fine actor when Israel Levison devoted his attention to finance, and his attitude of dignified dejection quite upset his sympathetic and unsuspecting companion.

"How many times have you been refused?" asked his Lordship.

"I've never even asked her," was the reply.

"Then how in the name of Peter and Paul do you know she's out of your reach? Look here, Levison," he went on earnestly. "It seems as if Providence is going to give me a chance to do you a good turn in exchange for the many you have been doing for me. In matters like this, I am by far the better man of the two. Money I know nothing about; you do. Women

(as far as any man may say so) are a subject about which I am far more familiar. Tell me your trouble, man, and you may rely on my assurance that there is absolutely nothing that I won't do to help you."

"You are more than kind," said the Jew. "But, nevertheless, you make my task all the harder. Let me try and put the facts before you in their right order, so that you may get the proper sequence of events." He paused and said seriously: "Above all, my lord, let there be no misunderstanding between us."

"There's no fear of that, Levison," was the confident reply.

"The lawn at Hurlingham was the scene of the first act in the only love-story I'm ever likely to know, and, although I've tried often enough, I've never been able to remember what was engaging my attention at the moment, when I suddenly saw a face in the crowd by the marquee. From that moment to this, there has been only one face in the world for me. The girl wasn't accompanied by anyone that I knew, so I lost no time in looking for a friend who would introduce me, for I vowed that nothing should prevent my getting to know her. I quickly found the man I wanted, but on our return, the party had vanished, and I was left

in a state of unrest such as I'd never known before."

The Jew carefully marked the effect of these fairy-tales upon his companion, and finding that they evidently interested him, proceeded:

"Some time elapsed before I obtained any further clew of any kind, and then, I saw her again in the stalls of a theatre. This time I had a companion with me, and he at once recognized her as Lady Barbara Devereaux."

He paused dramatically to let this sink in.

"Just so," he continued, seeing the start that the Marquis had given. "You now see how hard it is for me to tell my story." The difficulty was not enough to stop him, however, and so he went on: "Almost immediately afterwards, I met you at the Club, and the affair of the Friary timber gave me an idea which has since filled my brain to the exclusion of all else. While making enquiries on this business, my Agents couldn't help discovering the truly terrible condition in which your affairs then were, and I there and then made up my mind that, although it was the very height of improbability that I should ever win your daughter for my wife, I could at least see that she didn't suffer from any money worries, provided always that I kept anonymous. That was my

mistake," he added sadly. "I shouldn't have come to live so close to you, or been weak enough to allow myself to get to know you all so well. I thought myself stronger than I was, and am now paying the penalty."

No one could have bettered his bravely repressed emotion.

"This is all very startling as you tell it to me now," said Lord Devereaux. "I candidly confess that had you spoken during the Winter that we all spent together, I shouldn't have been surprised. Indeed, at one time I almost thought that you and Barbara had come to an understanding. And I say frankly—for what comfort it may be—I was quite prepared to sanction it."

"Thank you," said Levison softly.

"But now I can't understand it at all," continued the Marquis. "You say you haven't been refused, and yet you've deliberately avoided Barbara all this time, and lost a lot, if not all, of the ground you had undoubtedly gained. I simply can't understand it." The good-natured and bewildered nobleman seemed quite distressed, and was now as wax in the Jew's clever hands.

"I can enlighten you," said he. "If I may do so on my own terms; otherwise I dare not risk it."

"My dear sir," said the Marquis. "If you can clear the ground, by all means do so. What are these 'terms' you speak of?"

"Absolute secrecy," replied the Jew. "That is all, absolute and complete secrecy. If you agree, I'm going to tell you things which will strain your credulity to the utmost. Things which at first you certainly won't believe, and which afterwards, when you discover confirmation for yourself, you will insist on discussing with at least one other person. This would completely destroy all my carefully laid plans, and I'm not prepared to risk their failure. I don't like this playing in the dark any more than you do, but the object for which I am working is nothing less than the saving of your family from financial ruin, and unless I have your word to keep silence, it is better that I work alone."

"In matters of this sort," said the Marquis promptly, "there is no question that you are the better judge. I can only be thankful you take the interest you do. If, therefore, you think that silence on my part is necessary, then you have my word."

"I do," said Levison. "So, listen while I tell you what I have discovered, and try and not let your natural indignation spoil your

judgment. It was my hope at one time, in order to make your position absolutely secure, to get into my own hands all your outstanding obligations. Until that had been done, I could never be sure you were safe. My Agents, therefore, had instructions to buy this paper at all hazards. As you know, there's quite a lot of it and it lies scattered about in various hands, very few of whom know each other. Bear that in mind—it is most important—the majority of mortgagees have no communication with one another. And yet we find that in every single instance, some enemy of yours is acquiring each mortgage as it falls due and is slowly but surely getting into the position of holding your entire Estate at his complete mercy. I say 'enemy,' because it is evidently the Estate that he wants to get hold of, not merely the investment. I tested this by offering a premium for some of the paper and was refused. This evil genius of the House of Devereaux conceals himself behind a body called 'The Partnership Trust.' Yes, you may well start. Now you see why I could neither affirm nor deny my connection with the so-called 'Trust,' because at that time I dare not raise your suspicions. Thank Heaven I didn't, or I might never have been able to discover our greatest danger."

This clever assumption of a "joint" danger, completely fooled the Marquis, who was left convinced that his and Mr. Levison's interests were identical, a state of mind essential to the Jew's purpose.

"What struck me as being the most sinister part of the business," he went on, "was that this 'Partnership Trust' had the minutest information of your private affairs, and it is the possession of this which enables them to strengthen their hand at every turn. Are you beginning to see daylight?"

"Not in the very least," was the frank reply.

"Then, let me ask you to consider the facts. I particularly don't want to appear to make suggestions to you, lest I should seem to be prejudiced. The operation of this 'Partnership Trust' is undoubtedly a deliberate attempt to acquire your Estate. Its success has only been possible owing to its access to your private books. There is only one way in which that access could have been obtained."

"Good God!" exclaimed the Marquis, "you don't suggest that James Blenkinsopp is trying to ruin us all?"

"Scarcely," said the Jew smiling. "Had he wished to do so, it would have been done years ago, even supposing him to be capable of it,

which cannot be believed. No, the worst that can be said of Blenkinsopp is that he is a blind tool in the hands of others."

"But, WHO? man, WHO?"

"Isn't it plain enough yet? Think! Remember the date you first heard of this Trust at all? Wasn't it strangely coincident with the distribution of some of Blenkinsopp's authority? Is there not someone else besides your old and well-tried Agent who has access to the books?"

"JULIUS? Nonsense! The lad's as straight as a string. I absolutely refuse to even listen to the suggestion."

The Marquis rose to his feet, and, with a gesture, checked the other from speaking.

"Please say no more, Mr. Levison," he said sternly. "I've no explanation at the moment of the things you mention. All I am positively certain of is that you are wrong in your conclusions."

"You will do me the justice to remember," said the Jew quietly, "that your present attitude is precisely and in every particular just what I anticipated."

"Of course, what else could it be?" was the irritable reply.

"I can appreciate it the more," said Levi-

son, "because I myself felt exactly the same, until the proof became overwhelming."

"Proof, man, proof? So far, I've seen no proof. Circumstantial evidence, yes, but certainly no 'proof'."

"I am, of course, entirely in your hands," said the Jew mildly. "If you desire me to drop the whole thing, I'll do so at once and never refer to it again. I've tried to make my motive clear and would not have you misunderstand me."

"There is no case of misunderstanding," said the Marquis wearily, dropping back into his chair again. "God knows you've proved your good faith. You startled me, that's all. Perhaps you'd better tell me all you know."

This was considerably better than Mr. Levi-son had expected. He had been quite prepared to wait for many days for permission to tell his fiendish mixture of truth and falsehood.

"I will state the facts quite simply and without comment," said he. "The issue will then be in your own hands. They are as follows: This 'Partnership Trust' is rapidly becoming the real owner of your Estate. They have other motives than investment for so doing. They were never heard of until Bowles had access to the books. They undoubtedly act on infor-

mation that could only be obtained from either Bowles or Blenkinsopp. Bowles is known to be in constant—and private—communication with the ‘Trust’ Agents. Oh, dear, yes. I’m not saying a word that I cannot prove; Bowles is known to have received considerable sums of money from the aforesaid Agents. Bowles did receive from the Estate ten shillings, afterwards raised to two pounds, per week, and yet he has at a farm belonging to Mr. Carruthers a bunch of horses, some of them imported from America, which, although nominally the property of Carruthers, are in fact the property of Bowles, and all paid for in full. The value of these horses run into some thousands of pounds. I repeat, these are all facts of which I have positive proof.”

“But, damn it all, man,” burst out the Marquis. “The lad was but a child when he came to us, and he has not left the place since. These people, whoever they are, couldn’t have got hold of him before that?”

“Why not?” said the Jew. “He was—and is for that matter—to some extent a child in many things; but in others he is not only a man, but a very shrewd one. If we assume that he was in the hands of some unscrupulous principal, what more effective move could have been

made than placing the boy on your Friary property—just at the time when you were known to be staying there—and trusting to the lad's extremely attractive personality to get you interested in him? As a second string, there was always your son Phillip, who might at any time invite Bowles to stay in your house. When that had been accomplished, he was to pick up what information he could, and they would lay their plans accordingly. The trick succeeded even better than they could possibly have expected."

Now, to approach the library at Torrington Towers, you had first to traverse a short corridor leading from the hall and protected by heavy curtains, and Kit, being desirous of getting a book to take to bed with her, now pushed these aside and stood on the thick Brussels carpet, in time to hear her father exclaim:

"It all seems damnably clear enough. But I tell you plainly, Levison, nothing short of the boy's own confession will make me believe him the scoundrel you suggest."

"I have hopes of obtaining even that," said the Jew slowly.

And Kit crept quietly back to bed again.

CHAPTER XV

A MEDICAL CONFERENCE

"Dear Angel:

"For three solid weeks have I been trying to round you up for a very particularly private pow-wow, and each time you've slipped your halter. Meet me for certain—for certain, mind—down by the old bridge at 2.30 sharp, or there'll be battle, murder, and sudden death.

"KIT."

"Now, what does she mean by that?" mused Angel, as he read the note for the twentieth time, and strolled most unwillingly to keep the appointment.

Seeing Devils going in the same direction with his fishing rod, he hailed him as a saviour.

"Where are you going, Devils?" he called.

"Down to the mill, to try my luck," said Devils.

"There are some fine fish under the bridge," said Angel, cautiously. "The mill hasn't been worth a whoop this season."

"That so?" said Devils. "Then, I'll certainly try the bridge."

Kit smiled to herself as she saw them coming, and at once addressed her brother.

"Phil, dear," said she. "I've left my handkerchief in the house, will you please get it for me?"

"Why, what do you call that?" said Phil, pointing to the handkerchief in her belt.

"That isn't the one I want at all," said Kit. "It's the one with the little blue border. You'll find it on my dressing table."

"Oh . . . ho!" laughed Phil. "Sits the wind in that quarter?"

"And, Phil, dear," she called after him.

"Hello?"

"Please take a very long time finding it, will you?"

"Righto! Count me out," roared her brother, who took his way down to the mill.

"Now . . . what . . . the . . . Rural . . . Rocky Mountains?" said Angel blankly. "I'm sure beginning to think I'm the only sane guy left on this ranch."

"What's the trouble, Angel?" said Kit. "Come and sit down and tell me all about it."

"Gee!" said the excited Angel. "That's just what's got me beat. What IS the trouble? The Marquis acts like he don't trust me any more. Uncle looks as if he's lost a dollar and

found ten cents. You ain't like what you used to be. And I'm sure sickening for some kind of illness."

"ANGEL? Tell me at once. How dare you feel bad and not tell me?"

"I ain't had much opportunity lately," said Angel.

"That's your fault, and you know it," said the girl sharply. "Now then, out with it. What's the matter with you? Don't you DARE hide anything."

"Well, I ain't sure I can get the hang of it," said Angel doubtfully. "I've tried most everything, but it don't do no good. It started by losing my appetite . . . Don't take no sort of interest in the grub-pile now . . . Then, again, I can't sleep . . . have to get up and walk around . . . It's the very devil . . . Night after night, I catch myself hiking up the avenue; don't never seem to want to go no-where else. On top of it all, I can't keep still for five blessed minutes running. Now, what the Sam Hill IS the matter with me?"

A prolonged and distressing cough prevented Kit's immediate reply. Later on she managed to gasp out:

"You're suffering from astigmatism, Angel dear."

"Gosh . . .that sounds rotten," said the startled Angel. "What is it?"

"It's an 'affection' that prevents you seeing correctly," said Kit with an effort.

"Nothin' the matter with my eyes," said Angel indignantly.

"No, dear, but it sometimes settles in the heart. In your case it's certainly the heart."

"Holy Poker! What'll I do?"

"Obey my instructions implicitly. I know just what you want."

"Go to it, doc . . . and good luck to you," murmured Angel.

"Then, there are two things you musn't fail to do. The first is for yourself, and the second is for me."

"Give it a name."

"First of all, you've got to clear up this mystery about Mr. Levison."

"Levison?"

"Yes. It is he that is at the back of Father's strange behavior. He's up to some devilment to hurt you."

And she told him of the conversation she had overheard.

To her intense surprise, this information acted on Angel like a tonic. He fairly hugged himself with joy, and, for the first time since

she had returned home, laughed naturally in her presence.

"Oh . . . you . . . nasty . . . crawling little Jew . . . you," he cried. "I won't do a thing to you, I don't think . . . No, sir . . . Not one single blessed little thing. But if you imagine you'll carry your handsome dial around here when I'm through with you . . . you've surely got another think coming."

In his excitement, he had seized Kit's hand and waved it backwards and forwards. Then, realizing what he was doing, dropped it like a hot coal and blushed furiously.

"Gee! . . . I . . . I . . . beg your pardon," he stammered.

"Don't mention it," said Kit. "Like to wave the other one?"

And she held out her other hand.

"No, SIR . . . I . . . mean . . . No thank you."

When Kit smiled at him in the way she was smiling now, it always "tangled him all up."

"Then listen," went on Kit. "I've found out that you and Blenky have been asked up to dinner tonight to meet Mr. Levison, and that somehow or another Father has cornered him, and insisted on his saying to your face whatever it is that he's been saying behind your

back. I got you here to-day to warn you, so that you might be ready for him."

"I'm sure I'm much obliged," said Angel. "I'll be ready all right . . . AND waiting."

"Very well. That's settled," said Kit. "Now, the next thing you've got to do to get rid of your troubles is something for me. Do you remember writing to me at school and saying that if ever a man worried me as Jack was worrying Babs you'd 'fix' him for me?"

"You BET cher."

"Well, there IS a man. And I want him 'fixed'."

"The Devil!"

"No . . . o, not quite the Devil—more or less the opposite in fact—but he's got to be 'fixed' just the same."

"Who is he?" said Angel savagely.

"Put me on the mare and then I'll tell you what you've got to do," said Kit.

When she was firmly seated on Moonlight, she said seriously:

"Now, be very careful to do exactly as I say. You promise?"

"Sure."

"Then go straight home. Don't waste a single minute. Get in front of the largest mirror you've got, and then begin to 'do things'

to the gentleman opposite so that 'he won't know a cook-stove from an elephant's hind leg'."

And with a gay laugh and a wave of the hand, she galloped out of sight, leaving behind her an image of stone.

CHAPTER XVI

HEAVY WEATHER

Angel spent the rest of that afternoon wandering in and out of the old beech trees, trying to realize the truth that lay beneath Kit's laughter. In spite of his nineteen years, the "boy" in Angel had prevented him from even recognizing the possibility of Love having mastered him body and soul. Since Kit's return from school there had been so many unaccountable, but very real, causes of unrest, that the lad never dreamt of including any sentimental reason. The change in Kit and its consequent effect upon himself, he put down at once as nothing less than disaster of the worst kind; and the change in their old relations he had attributed entirely to the change in her, quite oblivious that he might have undergone a similar process.

In all his young life, Angel had never known what it was to hesitate when once his path showed clear ahead. He had seen the chance conversation of a passing prospector determine his father overnight to go from Cariboo

to the Yukon, or hike into the unknown hinterland without more preparation than the putting of the packs upon the ponies. And now that his future path was plain before him, made clear as noonday by the searchlight of Love, he had no pause, nor doubt, nor fear, but headed singing down the trail.

The sound of the dinner gong brought him up with a round turn. Unconsciously he had wandered in the direction of the Towers, all sense of time and place drowned in a flood of happy thought. There was no hope of his being in time for dinner, so he scribbled a note to Babs, making his excuses for being late, and sprinted back to the Cottage to dress.

One of the few fads that Lord Devereaux possessed was that of punctuality at meals, and the irritation caused by Angel's absence aggravated the nervousness he already felt whenever he thought of the coming interview.

Mr. Levison, knowing the weak points in the case he was about to make out, and trusting to his own quick wits to carry him through the approaching fight, was not nearly as comfortable as he would have liked to have been. Babs and Kit, partially aware of what was about to take place, were on edge with excitement and hopes for Angel's victory.

Devils, being the only unenlightened person of them all, and finding that his efforts at conversation met with only spasmodic response, gave it up as a bad job and ate his food in silence.

The approach of a tropical thunderstorm could not have been more apparent than was the highly charged atmosphere into which Angel now hastily and cheerily entered.

Untrammelled by a lifetime of conventions, Angel's eyes sought Kit's the very second he entered through the door, and the sight of what she saw there made her quickly drop her own.

"I must apologize for being so late, sir," said Angel, addressing his host, "the fact was I'd got to put through a job that made me forget that things like time and dinner ever existed."

"Perhaps if you will but give some attention to the latter now, you may be able to overtake us," said the Marquis.

"I surely will, sir. I could eat an ox, hide and all."

"Good for you," chipped in Devils. "You can keep me company. I'm the only one of the lot who's got any appetite at all tonight."

By dint of strenuous endeavor, Barbara, the Marquis and Levison kept up a semblance of

sociability, all three passing through a most villainously *mauvais quart d'heure*, while Angel made up for lost time, alternating his deeds as a trencherman with glances at Kit that made that young lady considerably more nervous than she had ever been in her life before.

When the matter of food had been adjusted and the handicap honorably wiped out, there was no need for any further racking of brains for subjects of conversation. It soon became obvious that Angel had taken charge of that department and that nobody was going to complain of being dull.

The opening gun was merely a "tracer," but it was not long before the whole arsenal on either side were banging away at one another hammer and tongs.

"Hope you got Uncle's note, Babs," began Angel. "He was looking forward to coming tonight, and surely hated to miss it."

"What's really wrong? Nothing serious, I hope?"

"No . . . o, not serious, just sort of tucked out. He's been overdoing it lately working over that bunch of cows we've just sold. And he sure has made some deal. We'll clear over two thousand pounds on the first sale alone."

It was very unfortunate that Angel should have started the very beginning of the evening by proving himself to be a liar; but he was quite ignorant of the fact that only that very morning the Agent had told Lord Devereaux that he, Blenkinsopp, had had absolutely nothing to do with this cattle deal, but that Angel had carried it through entirely by himself.

As if struck by an afterthought, Angel continued:

"Talking of cows, your old friend, 'Highland Chief,' was shot this morning. Rotten shame, I call it; he was a jolly useful beast."

Mr. Levison, like a fool, fell into the trap. He should have kept silence on so delicate a subject. Of course, he had no idea that Angel had been forewarned of his intentions, or he might have been more careful.

"I'm very glad to hear it," said he. "A farmer has no right to keep dangerous bulls; they are a menace to the public."

"Oh, come," said Angel mildly. "All bulls are more or less dangerous at times, and the Chief was a lamb compared to some I know. Of course," he added, "he didn't like you folks worrying round in his field. Nobody would."

"My good sir," said the Jew sarcastically. "Nobody WAS 'worrying round'."

"Wrong again," said Angel. "You was trespassing in his private pasture. Folks ain't got no right buttin' in where they ain't wanted."

The latter part of this speech flicked Mr. Levison on the raw.

"Of course," drawled Angel. "If your particular form of amusement happens to be hanging on to oak trees by the seat of your pants, then you played your hand fine."

The Marquis made the best showing, Babs came in an indifferent second, while Kit and Devils fairly laughed aloud.

"I suppose," said Mr. Levison savagely, "that there may have been a humorous side to the incident; personally, I didn't see it."

"That's a fact," replied Angel candidly. "You certainly didn't; but then, you suffered some from not being able to take a look at yourself just when you and your pantaloons had the decree nisi made absolute."

Devils disgraced himself. He exploded. It looked quite likely that Mr. Levison might follow suit, had not the Marquis jumped into the breach and saved the situation.

Following the usual procedure at the Towers, the servants all departed when dessert had been put upon the table. Angel, Devils, and the two girls were busily employed in

swopping phillipines, when the Marquis was heard to say:

"Yes, I must certainly run down to the Friary."

"That reminds me, sir," said Angel; "perhaps Mr. Levison can tell us whether his friend would have any objection to your staying in the old house. It would save that long walk up from the hotel." Turning to the Jew, he went on: "As you know, the house is on the half of the property your FRIEND bought?"

"I didn't know," replied Levison, "but there can be no question but that he would be delighted."

"Then, may I rely upon your seeing to it for me?" said the Marquis.

"I would do so with pleasure, but I think that if your Agent were instructed to write direct it might perhaps be better."

"Certainly," chipped in Angel eagerly. "I'll write tomorrow. By the way, what did you say was the address of your FRIEND?"

"Cyrus Weatherley, Solicitor, Old Burlington Street."

"Now . . . don't that beat . . . Halifax?" drawled Angel, pulling a letter out of the pocket of his dinner jacket. "Just listen to this: 'In answer to your enquiry, I beg to state

that with regard to Israel Levison, with the exception that he is a sort of glorified Jew Moneylender, of Lincoln's Inn Fields, I have absolutely no knowledge of him whatsoever.' Now, don't that beat all?"

"Who is that letter from?" said the Marquis sharply.

Angel mimicked the rather clipt enunciation of the Jew:

"Cyrus Weatherley, Solicitor, Old Burlington Street."

"Let me see it." Angel handed up the letter. "Humph! What do you make of it, Levison?"

Driven into a hole he had never expected, the Jew quickly realized that a colossal bluff was his only chance.

"May I look at the document?" he said quietly.

All trace of excitement had gone from his speech.

Taking the letter from the Marquis, he just glanced at the signature and then dropped it lightly on the table.

"Precisely what I expected," he said. "That signature is a forgery."

"Oh, what a LOVELY liar," murmured Angel.

"Julius," called the Marquis. "I must ask you to keep your language within reasonable bounds. This has come upon us rather quicker than I anticipated, but now that it is here, let it be cleared up once and for all."

"You'll have to excuse me, Gentlemen," said Angel, with a steely glint about his eyes that none of them had seen there before, "but if I don't always talk in what you'd call 'diplomatic language' it's because we do things some different in the Country where I come from. I don't want to make no false play over this jack-pot, so I'd be glad to ask a few questions."

"Certainly."

"Then I'd sure be glad to know if this is a frame-up?"

Then seeing the Marquis start, he added:

"By that I mean, do I understand that this past master of the art of prevarication has got some sort of a case all doped out against me? And that you, sir," he continued, turning to his host, "have invited me to accept your hospitality in order that he may fire it off without my having any warning?"

Lord Devereaux was more distressed than he cared to show. The boy had put his case so clearly, if crudely, that he could not but admit his justification.

"Julius," he said. "I'll be quite frank with you. I'm sorry to say that to some extent you are right. Mr. Levison, and even I myself, HAVE been making enquiries behind your back. I admit that it went much against the grain to do so, and I, for my part, am heartily ashamed that I did not insist on your knowing the facts as soon as I knew them myself."

"Thank you, sir," said Angel. "I just wanted to know where I stand."

"Now, Levison," continued his Lordship. "Please state your facts clearly and let's make an end of this."

"With pleasure," said Mr. Levison. "There are several things to be considered, but they all hinge on one salient point, viz: Is, or is not, Julius Bowles entitled to a position of trust in this household? That is only the really vital thing that matters—all the rest is subservient to it. I propose, therefore, to answer that question by one perfectly plain statement, which in itself tells us all that we need to know: Julius Bowles left Cranborough under the suspicion of having stolen the sum of one hundred and fifty pounds from the School Funds."

Mr. Levison ceased speaking amidst a dead silence, and noticing the blank look that came over Angel's face, congratulating himself that the game was now in his hands.

Devils sprang to his feet, but before he could speak, Angel stopped him.

"Well," came the slow drawling voice at last. "That ain't quite so big a lie as the last one."

"Listen, boy," said the Marquis with emotion. "I beg you to treat this matter seriously. Is Mr. Levison speaking the truth or not?"

"I'll answer that," said Devils. "Shut up, Angel, I'll be hanged if I'll sit and listen to these rotten lies any longer. No, Dad, I will NOT moderate my speech. There is only one word in the English language to express drivel of this sort and that is LIE. If you must have the history of that hundred and fifty pounds, I—your son—was the person accused of stealing it, and just because he thought I'd have the deuce of a job clearing myself, Angel-Face faked up a lot of evidence to throw the blame on himself. He then got brain fever and refused to return to School, although the Old Man begged him to. It was after that illness that he met you, sir. I should like to add, so that there shall be no shadow of suspicion of question of doubt on this matter, that we both of us possess letters from the Head, completely exonerating either of us from any connection with the theft."

And Devils sat down to the murmured applause of the two girls.

Nobody spoke for a moment, then Angel said:

"Does that complete the entertainment, or is there any more of it?"

"You've heard the explanation, Mr. Levi-son," said the Marquis. "What have you got to say to it?"

The Jew never hesitated.

"I'm more than delighted to hear it," he said. "The facts, so far as any outsider could gather them, were as I stated; and I repeat I am very glad to hear your son give so satisfactory an explanation. Perhaps my next questions may not be so easy to answer," he went on viciously. Facing Angel squarely, he said: "It is a fact that you personally own a lot of horses now being broken at Chamford Farm?"

"Well," said Angel. "I wasn't putting it in the newspapers just yet, but you've struck a winner at last."

"And that they are worth some thousands of pounds at least?"

"You bet they are."

"Thank you. May one be so bold as to ask how you got the money to pay for these horses?"

"One may. And one may also be instructed to go plumb to the Devil."

"Ah . . . this is getting interesting. You have, I think, some knowledge of the 'Partnership Trust'?"

"You think correct."

"Have you any personal interest in the Trust?"

The Jew fairly hissed the question across the table, and for the first time in the cross-examination, Angel seemed to hesitate with his reply.

"Just what do you mean by 'interest'?" he said cautiously.

"Surely that is plain enough. However, let us be clearer; do you derive any pecuniary benefit from this Trust, either directly or indirectly? Is **THAT** clear?"

Angel took a nut from the dish in front of him, cracked it, dipped it in the salt, and said evenly:

"What about it if I do?"

"Thank you, Mr. Bowles," said the Jew, in a glow of satisfaction. "That is all I need."

"Then you're easily satisfied," said Angel, enjoying his nut.

"I don't think we need trouble Mr. Bowles any further," said Mr. Levison, turning to his host.

"Maybe not," replied that young man, "but it's the surest bet you know that Mr. Bowles is going to trouble you some. And now that I've answered all you want me to answer, will somebody kindly put the key in the lock so we can all have a look inside?"

"Julius," said the Marquis, "will you allow me to ask a few questions?"

"Sure, sir."

"Do you know that this 'Partnership Trust' is rapidly acquiring, if indeed it has not already done so, a controlling interest in my Estate?"

"I do."

"And that consequently I shall be entirely at their mercy?"

"Yes."

"Do you know whether this Trust was formed for this specific purpose?"

"It was."

"Are you supplying them with information from my private books to enable them to carry out their purpose?"

"Mr. Blenkinsopp and I are, between us."

"Good God, is Blenkinsopp in it too?"

"Certainly."

"Why? . . . Why? . . . That is what I cannot understand . . . Why?"

"I'll tell you, sir," said Angel. "I'd have

told you right at the start if you'd only asked me and not treated me like I was some sort of tame criminal. One man alone held nearly all the mortgages when I first saw the books. Of course, they were not all in his name, that would be too fresh, but he owned 'em all the same. Remember that plaster on the very ground we're standing on now that nearly bust everything up? Well . . . that was him. Fortunately Uncle and I got on to his game, which, if I don't miss my guess, was to get you in a hole and then get Babs to pull you out of it. Yes, I don't wonder Mr. Levison has a pressing engagement, for that crooked Jew there was out for blood, and now he ain't no more danger than a feeding bottle."

It was a glorious rout, horse, foot and guns; all was depicted in the evil face of the discomfited Jew. The Marquis merely stood in his place, and nobody hindered Mr. Levison from beating a hasty retreat from the field of battle.

"Well," said Angel. "He asked for it . . . and he got it. Will some-one pass me the nuts?"

"Boy," said the Marquis, holding out his hand, "I'm sorry."

"Say no more, partner," said the boy. "That slick guy would have fooled anyone."

"I still don't understand how you raised the money. Who is this fairy godmother, this 'Partnership Trust'?"

"Me and you, partner. You got the goods, I find the cash."

It was well on into the morning before they all got to bed, after listening to all that Angel had to tell them.

Kit opened her hand when she got upstairs to her own room and spreading out the crumpled little scrap of paper read:

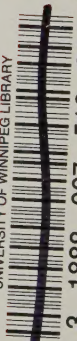
"Meet—Old Bridge—EARLY, Angel."

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